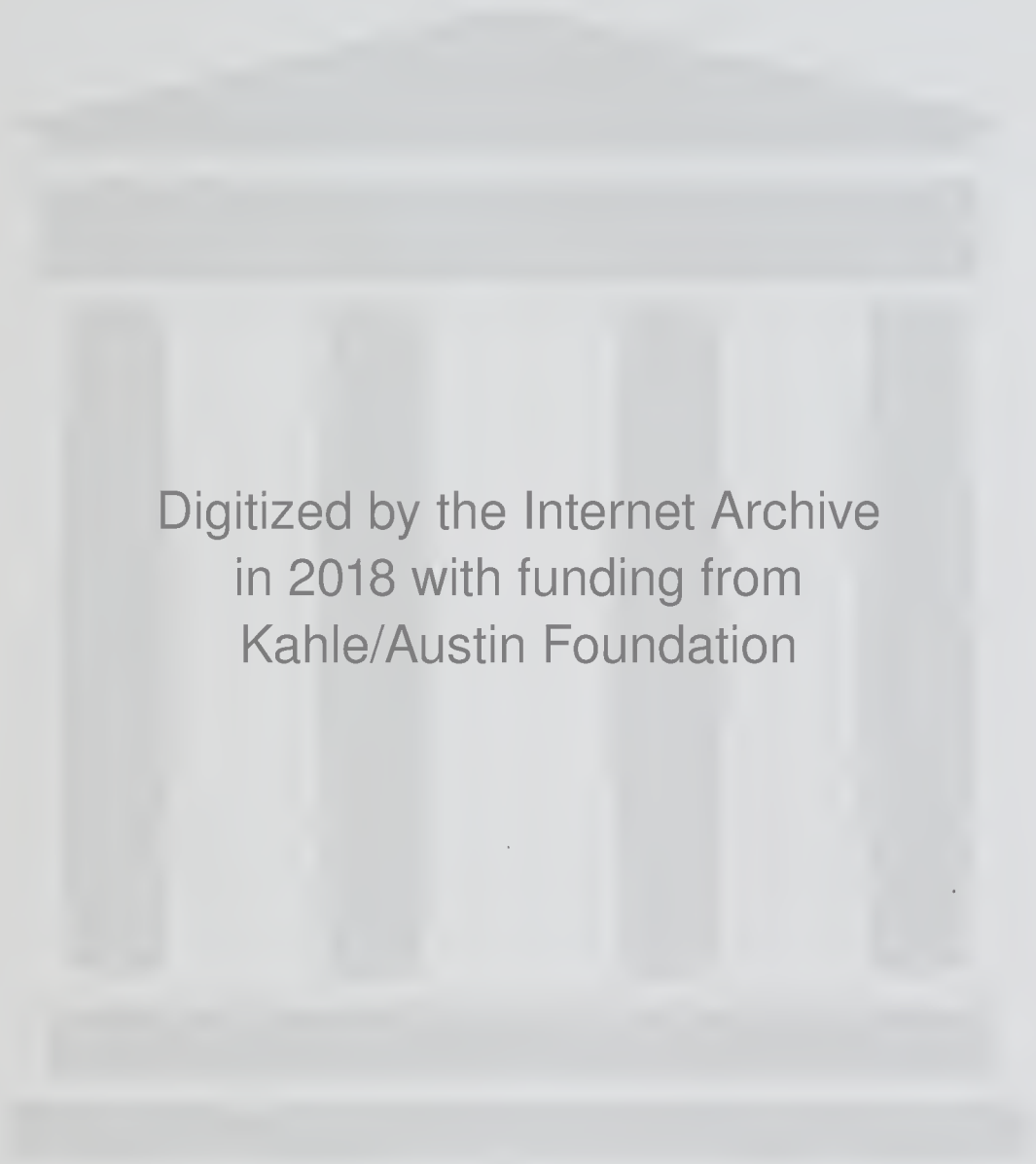
ANDY BLAKE AND THE POT OF GOLD

BY LEO EDWARDS



A SHARP CLATTER OF HOOFS SOUNDED THROUGH THE ROOM AS THE ANIMAL CHARGED.

Andy Blake and the Pot of Gold. *Frontispiece* (*Page* 106)

ANDY BLAKE

AND THE POT OF GOLD

BY

LEO EDWARDS

AUTHOR OF

THE JERRY TODD BOOKS
THE POPPY OTT BOOKS
THE ANDY BLAKE BOOKS

ILLUSTRATED BY

BERT SALG

GROSSET & DUNLAP
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Made in the United States of America

To

My Boy Pal

RALPH BENTSON

of

Aurora, Illinois

OUR CHATTER-BOX

HELLO, gang! Well, here we are with another "Chatter-Box"—our eighth, to be exact. And it certainly ought to be a good one. For the letters I have here before me (this is Leo Edwards speaking) sure are bully. I see pictures, too—pictures of fine-looking, wide-awake boys—and poems. Such marvelous poems!

To the newcomers I'll explain briefly that "Our Chatter-Box" is a department, appearing in all of my books (the Jerry Todds, Poppy Otts, Andy Blakes and Trigger Bergs), open to all readers. If you write me an interesting letter I'll try to find a place for it in a future "Chatter-Box." And if you write an accepted poem, your reward will be a free autographed copy of the book in which your poetic masterpiece appears. Writers of accepted letters do not receive awards, as I figure that the publication of such letters is sufficient reward in itself.

And now let us dig into this big pile of letters.

LETTERS

MY CHUM and I," writes George Sentman of Moline, Ill., "often pretend that we are Jerry and Poppy. Taking our dog with us, we explore places and try and get into mysteries. Sometimes we bury little treasures and have each other hunt for them. I have a toy boat called the *Tittering Totem*, and also when summer comes we will give that name to a raft that we are going to build. We are undecided yet whether to launch the raft in the Mississippi River or the Rock River. After we read the *Talking Frog* we tried to catch frogs, but all we got for our trouble was muddy feet (and a bawling out when we got home). After reading the *Seven-League Stilts* we made stilts. The other day when we were on a hike we met a gang of older boys. And when we refused to fight with them they fired bricks at us. One of the bricks struck our dog, which made us hot. If we had been bigger they would have paid dearly for their meanness. We called them the Stricker gang."

"Whenever I read a Jerry Todd or Poppy Ott book," writes Chester Paul Siess of Alexandria, La., "my parents make me go off by myself as my continued giggling annoys them."

Maybe, Chet, we'll have to rig up some kind of a muffler for that giggling apparatus of yours.

"Why not have a hill billy in one of your future books," suggests Robert L. Flanagan of New York City. "Give him long, lanky legs, big ears, buck teeth and a southern drawl."

So that's what a hill billy looks like, huh? I've often wondered. Also Bob requested the necessary rituals to organize

his own branch Goldfish club.

"I have just finished reading the first book in your Andy Blake series," writes Allen J. Ross of Erie, Pa. "It was a great book and I enjoyed it very much, but there seemed to be something lacking. At first I didn't know just what was missing, and even now that I think I know I'm not sure that I can express myself clearly. Well, anyway, here goes: When I compared the book with a Poppy Ott I found some similarity in that the chief characters were both real American boys. But then I noticed (or at least I thought I noticed) that while the Poppy Ott book had a lot of plot running through the whole story the Andy Blake book seemed to be composed of little plots concerning each sale, etc. The Poppy Ott book held the reader's interest from the very start, while in the Andy Blake book at the end of each little exciting incident the reader's interest lapsed—at least mine did.

"This is the first letter I've written to you and I sort of feel foolish trying to criticize your work. I'm probably wrong, but anyway it won't do any harm. My English teacher says that helpful criticism is better than unmerited praise. But now I'm going to give you some merited praise. Your Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott books are the best books for boys that I've ever read. In my opinion they are the nearest to coming up to my English teacher's standard of good literature and yet be interesting and not 'dry' that I have ever seen."

You certainly are an observing reader, Allen. And I understand exactly what you mean. The first Andy Blake book was made up of episodes. But the other books of this series are continuous in plot.

One time in Cambridge, Wisconsin, where I spend my summers, I helped the Boy Scouts put on a play taken from one of my books. Bob Billings was Red Meyers. You know how Red eats! Well, gaze upon this letter from Bob:

"We had a goose for Christmas, weighing about fourteen pounds. I ate half of it. Boy, it sure was good. That same day I ate two boxes of candy."

"We have a room library in our school," writes Joe Zachotina of Cicero, Ill., "to which one boy contributed four Jerry Todds. And then the scramble began, for the books were wanted by everybody. When my teacher wants to amuse the class, she lets me give a comical report on one of your books."

"I just got a pup and named him Poppy," writes Jack Rogan of Venice, Calif.

Bow-wow-wow (Poppy speaking)!

"One time I borrowed the *Whispering Mummy* from a friend," writes Robert Kapp of East Liverpool, Ohio. "I liked the book so well that I bought the whole series. It took all of my allowance for six weeks, but the pleasure I got out of the books was worth double the price."

"My two chums and I have been building a cabin in the mountains," writes Guy C. White of Bennington, Vt. "We

are now waiting to get our stove taken up there."

And what fun these three Boy Scouts will have in their snug mountain cabin! I'd like to be there myself. I like that kind of stuff. Trees and hills, and bacon sizzling in the pan and ants galloping around in the butter. That's the life!

"My chum named his two goldfish Poppy and Jerry," writes Homer Weaver of Springfield, Mo.

"My chum and I (his name is Phil Rogers), having just read the *Rose-Colored Cat*, tried to start a feline rest farm like the one in the book," writes Allan Greene of Clinton, Wis. "But we couldn't find any cats. We missed our dinners one day chasing two cats. We chased those blamed cats all over town. But they were too much for us. Can't you send us some cats, Mr. Edwards? Not less than six."

Hear that, gang? Al wants cats. So if you have any pop-eyed, bent-legged wrecks on hand, here's your chance to get rid of them.

"Here is a book review that I wrote about the *Whispering Mummy*," writes Milton Goldstein of New York City. "'*Jerry Todd and the Whispering Mummy* was written by Leo Edwards. Jerry is an American boy about fourteen years of age. The scene opens in Tutter, a thriving town in Illinois. Jerry and his gang undergo many strange experiences with a mummy which whispers mysteriously. The boys are persuaded to recover the vanished mummy by an old man who represents himself to be a mummy inspector.' That is my report. And having heard it, all of the boys in my room are now interested in the Jerry Todd books."

"Is it true that you are a human being?" writes George Moore of New York City. "Gee! Anybody who can write stories like you should be President of the United States. One time I told my chums about the *Seven-League Stilts*. And they laughed so hard (meaning my chums and not the stilts) that I had to throw water on them."

Am I a human being! My gosh! I hope, George, that you didn't think I was an ape.

And here's a long letter from a little Jewish boy in an orphans' home. "Your books are the most wonderful thing to me in all the world," he writes—and as I go on down through his letter I'm mighty glad I'm a book writer. For there can be no doubt of the sunshine that I have brought into this lonely boy's otherwise drab life. He never owned a book, he said, until a boy gave him one of my books. "When I get out of the Home," the little fellow concludes, "and have a steady job, I'm going to buy every book you have written."

Maybe you'd like to send this boy some of your old books. I'll gladly furnish his address if you'll write to me.

"I earn spending money by selling itch and sneeze powder to the boys in school," writes Tom King of Stockdale, Texas. "With each sale I give a Swiss warbler."

They may be wonderful warblers, Tom, but I'll be cow-kicked

if I could make the one warble that you sent me.

POEMS

AND now let us fiddle around for a few minutes in this pile of poems. Well, well! The first one isn't so worse. Not quite like Milton's stuff. But he was kind of old-fashioned anyway. John Alderman of Kincaid, Ill., Box 277, received an autographed book for this one:

Jerry's Gang

Jerry Todd and his gang
Are a whiz-bang.
They are full of pep and fun
And always on the run.
That's Jerry and his gang.

Jerry and his loyal crew
Will afford thrills for you.
Boy! How they can battle
And make Bid's gang travel.
This boy Jerry and his crew.

Jerry and his brave crew
Are Juvenile Jupiter Detectives, too.
They have fun and mystery galore—
These clever detectives four.
That's Jerry and his crew.

And how about this one, written in a perfectly sane moment (so I'm told) by Jack Carleton Anderson of Roseville, Calif., Box 296.

The Tittering Totem

Oh, Fuzzy Wuzzy thinks he's big;
He's fatter than an overgrown pig.
His dear little son, with unending pride,
In his little Tweet Tweet took a fast ride.

Poor wabbly Betsy, that old tin can,
At seventy miles an hour
Down the street she ran.
Boom! went a tire;
Bang! went a spring;
For poor old Betsy the angels did sing.

Here's another short one from Louis Clement, Jr., 1749 W. 97th St., Chicago, Ill.

Books

Books and books I've read galore,
But books and books I'll read some more.
Poppy Ott and Jerry Todd
I like best because they're odd.

Poppy is a faithful kid,
Sure knows how to knock out Bid.
Jerry Todd is all right, too.
Kids like him are very few.

This one was written by a girl, Lola Lennox of 38 W. 21st St., Indianapolis, Ind.

Thank you, my dear Mr. Edwards,
For introducing to me
So many fine boys and real grown-ups—
They are just what folks should be.

Now, Rory Ringer, with his English talk,
And Uncle Jonah, with his sailor walk,

Then Red Meyers, with his freckles thick
(And where's the boy that Peg can't lick?),
Now, Scoop Ellery, with his brains and grin,
Henny Bibbler, with his legs so slim.
About Jerry Todd I dare not write,
For he is very much too bright.

With a gang of boys like that, you see,
I would very much enjoy to be.

This one is the brain child of Arthur W. Salstrom of 203 N. 9th Ave., Mount Vernon, N. Y.

Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott,
They're the boys that know just what.
Scoop and Peg are just the same.
They sure know how to play the game.

Red he dearly loves to eat,
But at sight of a ghost uses his feet.
We must not forget the Stricker gang.
As for them they can all go hang.

And now let us see what a Michigander can do. Here's one (it sure deserves an autographed book, all right) written by Tom Hanson, Jr. (one of our most active Club Leaders), of 407 Cedar St., Sault Ste Marie.

A Happy Reunion

Please, boy readers,
Shut off the din.
Put on your earphones
And listen in.

You, too, Bill Hadley,
And Cap'n Tinkertop.
Hurry up, Jerry!
Let's go, Poppy Ott!

We're announcing the family,
Of the famous Goldfish League.
Even Leo Edwards
Who "committed" the deed.

Scoop is here
And so is Red.
Also the checker player,
Caleb Obed.

Now that we're here,
And the party has begun,
Let's start up the music
And have some fun.

The Cap'n's in the corner
With Caleb Obed,
To play their game of checkers
Till they're dizzy in the head.

Scoop danced a crazy jig,
While Jerry sang a song.
Red, as usual, is peeved—
He always gets in wrong.

Now, to stop a possible fight
I think we better say,
The party will have to finish,
And end the fun for to-day.

Since you know something about us,
You ought to know more.
And I'm sure you'll find us
At the nearest bookstore.

This one, written by John Foley of 70 Florence St., Worcester, Mass., is interesting because it is different:

Uncle Joe's Lesson

"Tell a story, Uncle Joe,
About yourself," I said one night,

At his home while visiting—
  While the fire was burning bright.

"Well," said he, "when I was six,
  Dad gave me a shiny dime
For my own, to spend indeed,
  Any way to have a time.

"I thought my chum was very wise—
  Jim, a boy my age and size.
So I showed him what I had.
  And he seemed most awful glad!

"'Say,' said he, 'that dime will get
  More for me than you, I'll bet.
I can get just twice as much.
  I'll give you your half of such.'

"Well, I gave it to that kid.
  Can you guess just what he did?
The next morning he just said:
  'I lost it standing on my head.'"

"I have a longing," writes Dick Barry of 69-12 Griffith Ave., Ridgewood Sta., L. I., N. Y., "to receive a letter from you, my favorite author. I have put that longing into verse. Every word of the accompanying poem is sincere and true except the part about the shaving mug and tapestry rug. I had to put that stuff in to make it rhyme."

A Plea

I'm a Freckled Goldfish,
  Number four thousand two,
And I long to get a letter,
  Dear Leo, from you.

I've asked for your portrait,
  For your pen or shaving mug,
I've sent in poems and letters,
  And even a tapestry rug.

I think of you as a father,
  I'd like to be Beanie, your son.
Oh, boy, if that really could happen,
  I bet I'd have oodles of fun.

Now, I usually feel quite lonely,
  Sometimes I'm terribly blue.
So I'd like to get a long letter,
  A friendly letter from you.

P.S. What in tarnation (inquires Dick) *is* a tapestry rug, anyway? I'll be blamed if I know.

This one, written by J. McManus of 136 Baltic St., Brooklyn, N. Y., was inspired by the new book, *Trigger Berg and His 700 Mouse Traps:*

We speak of Dynamite the goat,
  A beast of great renown.
They gave him Peruna with a squirt-gun,
  And now he's banished from the town.

Also the new Trigger Berg books inspired this one, written by Len Rubin of 5821 Larchwood Ave., Philadelphia, Pa.

Trigger Berg

My name is Trigger Berg,
  I live in Crocketville, Illinois.
My pals, I want you to know,
  Are three swell boys.

My ma and pa, I'll add here,
  Are the best parents in all the state.

I never got a licking yet.
  Yes, sir! They are first-rate.

We are some high steppers—
  That four-cornered gang of mine.
Our thrilling adventures are many,
  But some do not turn out so fine!

Bill Hopwood of Primos, Pa., P. O. Box 37, another live Club Leader, contributes this one:

Chums

Poppy is a good kid,
  And so is Jerry Todd.
The way they go around together
  They're like two peas in a pod.

Art is another pal,
  He owns a motor boat.
The way he drove it down the lake
  He got poor Fuzzy's goat.

Winker had a funny eye,
  'Twas made of solid glass.
And he won't let the younger folks
  Give him any sass.

Henry Baumann of 145-70 223rd St., Springfield, N. Y., has had his name in the "Chatter-Box" before. This time he blossoms out as a poet. Behold his masterpiece!

When the night was dark and stormy
  I used to sit and fret,
Because if I left the house
  I surely would get wet.

But now when the night is stormy
  From the house I ne'er emerge.
I take a Trigger Berg book
  And in it I submerge.

Let it rain, let it pour,
  I don't care any more.
For when I'm through with this book
  There will be many more.

Although I am no poet,
  And may be shy on rhyme,
I hope to read the Berg books
  Until the end of time.

This one was written by Owen Palmer of Moylan, Pa.

Andy Blake was a salesman smart,
In business deals he did his part.
He upset old Hatch's "apple cart."
Andy Blake was a salesman smart.

The Galloping Snail was an auto frail,
That bumped its way o'er hill and dale.
They bought it at a bargain sale.
The Galloping Snail was an auto frail.

Admiral Pepper was a gander queer,
He was spotted, it did appear.
The haunted house he was ever near.
Admiral Pepper was a gander queer.

The Talking Frog was a wonderful thing,
It could talk and it could sing.
It made old Ricks a factory king.
The Talking Frog was a wonderful thing.

Ivory Dome was a funny guy,
He turned out to be a secret spy.

He fooled his wife as easy as pie.
Ivory Dome was a funny guy.

And still they come! This one was put together with a croquet mallet and carving knife by Alfred Lame of 68 San Jose Ave., San Francisco, Calif.

Muddled Titles

I've read so much of Poppy Ott,
  That when I sleep I dream
I see the Freckled Goldfish
  Swimming in the stream.

I'm climbing up the Seven-League Stilts
  To reach the Tittering Totem,
And as the titles muddle up
  My mind it goes a-floating.

Now, for a ride
  On the Galloping Snail;
And the Rose-Colored Cat says:
  "I lost my tail!"

The Stuttering Parrot
  Talks a great deal;
So the Pedigreed Pickles
  I'll eat at my meal.

Then off I'll start
  To the Whispering Cave,
Where I'll find Jerry Todd,
  The wise little knave!

He gave me a fright
  With his Whispering Mummy;
And I'll say his Talking Frog
  Is no dummy.

Now, I'll take one more chance
  At the Oak Island Treasure.
The Pirate had the Waltzing Hen
  Dance for his pleasure.

The Bob-Tailed Elephant
  Does tricks galore,
But the Purring Egg
  Has me muddled once more.

The dream it is over,
  I'm now wide awake,
And ready to eat
  The Prancing Pancake.

O. B. Stanby, Jr., of 1617 Clover Lane, Fort Worth, Texas, hastily separated himself from this one:

I'm not so hot on the typewriter,
  As you can plainly see.
But since I'm not,
  I want to better be.

And, by the way, if practice
  Will make perfect, gee,
It should have finished, long ago,
  The job of fixing me.

Thank heavens we have only one more—for don't overlook the fact, you young poets, that each of these published poems cost me the price of a book. Curtis Hays of 1924 W. 9th St., Oklahoma City, Okla., contributes the final offense.

Trigger Berg

I know a boy by the name of Trigger Berg,
  A lively little scamp is he.
I first became acquainted with him
  In the book called the *Treasure Tree*.

Since I have read the *Treasure Tree*,
  I have become a Trigger Berg fan.
Because Trigger loves to help people,
  Just like a little man.

MORE LETTERS

FOUR years ago," writes Robert Kirk of East Palestine, Ohio, "a friend of mine brought *Jerry Todd and the Waltzing Hen* to school. Liking the 'Hen' book I bought *Jerry Todd and the Whispering Mummy*. It wasn't long till I had the complete series. Then I started in on the Poppy Otts. I buy your books as fast as they come out and am always eagerly waiting for more. Your books are all a boy could want. They are full of fun and mystery; and there is no 'hero' stuff in them."

"We have a library in our class in school," writes Henry Egbert of Philadelphia, Pa., "and I am librarian. We supplied our own books. I contributed *Jerry Todd and the Purring Egg*, which book hasn't remained in the library for a day at a time. In *Poppy Ott's Pedigreed Pickles* I like it best where the old man sprinkled pepper on Poppy and the new kid. That was funny."

"For Christmas in 1928," writes Mark Hopkins, Jr., of Helena, Mont., "I got my first Jerry Todd book, later lending it to my chums. But when we went to the bookstore for more Jerry Todds the dealer hadn't any in stock. We finally persuaded him to order a set. Now they are his biggest sellers."

Thanks, Mark. You helped me and also helped yourself. All boys can secure my new books as fast as they come out if they'll pattern after you.

"Speaking of pets," writes Bill Hopp of Terre Haute, Ind., "last summer I had one horned toad known as Horny, two large frogs, Buster and Hopper (Buster measured a foot and eight inches when stretched out), about twenty small frogs, two large box turtles, Uncle Sam and Ossie, and last but not least, Cap'n Tinkertop, a tiny box turtle. Also I have a stuffed heagle (excuse me, I mean eagle), which was given to me by my grandfather."

In conclusion Bill asks for the address of Art Davidson (in the *Tittering Totem*) and Bert Salg, the talented artist who illustrates my books. Address your letters to Art in care of the Harley-Davidson Motor Cycle Company, Milwaukee, Wis., and to Bert Salg at Congers, N. Y.

"My chums and I like to build huts," writes Kenneth Farrell of Syracuse, N. Y. "Recently we built a big one. It would be fun, we agreed, to sleep in it. Waking up in the middle of the night (which was the night several convicts escaped from a prison near here), we carried our mattress to the roof of the hut, where we lay looking up at the stars. The hut, I should add, was in Heinie Mogerihaus' back yard. Pretty soon we heard a noise. Gee! Sounded like someone cutting a screen. Arming ourselves with hammers we sneaked around to the front of the house. The sound came from the supposedly empty house next door. Pretty soon a man came into sight and drove away in a car. To this day we don't know who he was. But he had been in the house, as the cut window screen proved."

Which shows that Jerry Todd isn't the only fellow who has mysterious adventures.

"I had many a shiver when I read *Poppy Ott and the Galloping Snail*," writes Alger G. Johnson, Jr., of Tewksbury, Mass. "Jerry Todd is a scream. Old Hungry Face (Red Meyers), Scoop Ellery and Peg Shaw are just as funny to me. I just hate the Stricker gang, especially Bid and Jimmie."

"I, too, like *Jerry Todd and the Oak Island Treasure*," writes Gordon Hunley of New Rochelle, N. Y., in commenting on my books. "But the one that wins the celluloid stove poker is *Jerry Todd and the Rose-Colored Cat. Funny?* Say, I nearly ripped the buttons off my shirt, I laughed so hard."

Norman Browning of Richardson Park, Dela., doesn't like my Andy Blake books. He says they "make him sick." He wants more Trigger Bergs, he says. The trouble is, Norman, you are too young for Andy. He's in his early twenties. His adventures are those of an older boy. Later you'll like him. Many older boys do.

"I think that was a peachy idea about the giant slingshot in the 'Pirate' book," writes Bob Bringham of Bath, N. Y. "The boys must have been pretty strong to shoot it. I think the Jerry Todd series is a wow."

"When I am tired, or school doesn't go so well," writes Lawrence Hall of Jersey City, N. J., "I cheer myself up by reading one of your funny books."

"I got my Goldfish membership card and button while I was at camp," writes Gene Bain of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. "And weren't the kids jealous! I told them they ought to read your dandy books. I've been reading and rereading the Jerry Todds and Poppy Otts for three years. I laugh so hard Mom thinks the house is falling down. Kids pay me five cents apiece to borrow my books. And always they ask for the Todd and Ott books first. Now I'm reading the new Trigger Berg books. Boy, I don't know how I'll ever wait for the *Sacred Pig*. I'm going to make a totem pole. And I named my bicycle the Sally Ann—for it's just as good a bike as the Sally Ann was a boat."

TRIGGER BERG

IN BRINGING out this new series of books (for quite small boys and girls), I was in hopes that the thousands of loyal Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott fans would take Trigger and his skylarking pals, Slats, Friday and Tail Light, to their hearts. And they sure have; for which I am grateful. For Trigger is one of my best loved story characters. The third book of the series, *Trigger Berg and the Sacred Pig*, will appear soon. Like the preceding titles, it will be packed with fun.

"I think *Trigger Berg and His 700 Mouse Traps* is the funniest book I ever read; and the Poppy Otts (I have them all) the most mysterious," writes a Long Island City boy, who signs his letter "Your Pal, Wolfram."

Which prompts me to remind boys that they should *always* sign their letters in full, giving

their complete names and addresses, no matter how many letters they have written to me. I can't take the time to look up addresses.

"I nearly split my sides when Red came out of the operation (in the *Freckled Goldfish*) one big freckle," writes Lester R. Nahouse of Rutherford, N. J. "And when the freckle mud disappeared I nearly hopped out of my shoes. Gee! I wish there was a boy named Trigger Berg!"

"I have read (and own) all of your books except the Andy Blakes," writes Charles Spear of Brooklyn, N. Y. "Andy's stories are a little too old for me as I'm only ten. I like Trigger Berg best of all. I nearly had a fit when Trigger, in the *Treasure Tree*, put the mice in Mrs. Diccup's kitchen. Gosh! I knew he'd catch it."

"I like the Jerry Todd books the best, especially where Jerry falls down the chimney in the *Talking Frog*," writes Claude W. Helwig of San Francisco, Calif. "In *Trigger Berg and the Treasure Tree* I like it where Friday and Trigger rode around on Pancake, the old horse, looking for Uncle Jupe's missing false teeth."

"In school to-day," writes Willard Carpenter of Jamaica, N. Y., "I gave an oral book report on *Trigger Berg and the Treasure Tree*. Our principal was in the room. She laughed, telling me my report was excellent."

"I have just read the *Treasure Tree*," writes Charles F. Spiro of Yonkers, N. Y. "Oh, boy! Is it swell! That phantom smoke and the skeleton in the hollow tree! Wow! Did I have the shivers! Just as I came to the 'skeleton' part our steam radiator make a popping, hissing noise and I nearly hit the ceiling."

"I think Trigger Berg and his pals are hot in the new books," writes Albert Morgan of Jamaica, N. Y. "Boy, did I ever laugh when Tail Light's suspenders broke at the party! Our Goldfish club is getting along fine."

"I sure enjoyed the first Trigger Berg book," writes Shirley Le Clair of Chicago. "Trigger loves to eat licorice and Tail Light ate enough peanuts to fill forty-nine cows. I am saving my money to buy the next Berg book. There's more fun in the *Treasure Tree* than any book I ever read. You should have heard me laugh!"

"Boy, Trigger Berg sure is a corker," writes Warren Greenspan of Yonkers, N. Y. "I bet that he, Slats, Friday and Tail Light (last, as usual!) have a hot time in the *Sacred Pig*. I have read many books but none as good as these."

Also, Warren sends me a picture of a totem pole, telling me humorously that probably Red and Rory (Rory, dying for air, yells: "Gimme hair! Gimme hair!") could make a better one.

"I just finished reading *Trigger Berg and His 700 Mouse Traps*," writes Robert L. Flanagan of New York City, "and it sure is a wow. In the 'Chatter-Box' in the back of the book a boy named Henry K. Vye said he liked the Jerry Todd books best. But I think the Otts and

Bergs are just as good. At first, though, I was doubtful of the new Bergs because they were written in diary form. But I soon changed my mind! Boy, they sure are *hot*. I think the 'Chatter-Box' is a great idea, because a reader learns what the rest of the gang thinks about your books. I hope that *Trigger Berg and the Sacred Pig* will soon be out."

SCHOOL CLUB

THE complete announcement of this new club was given in *Jerry Todd, Editor-in-Grief*. I haven't space here to repeat the announcement. To earn a free autographed copy of *Trigger Berg and the Sacred Pig* (in which book the names of members will be printed together with the names of prize winners), please read the announcement in the "Grief" book and follow the rules.

"Our teacher, Miss Yager," writes George Bluenstein of Brecksville, Ohio, "has been reading some of your books to us. She is now reading *Poppy Ott and the Tittering Totem*."

"I took my Freckled Goldfish letter to school to show to my teacher," writes Jack Herb of Pittsburgh, Pa. "She laughed when she got to the 'poor fish' part. Then she told me to bring one of your books to school."

"To-morrow," writes Edward Maisel of Buffalo, N. Y., "I am going to ask my teacher to read *Poppy Ott and the Stuttering Parrot* to the class. I might add, too, that I bear the envious title of having read more of the Ott and Todd series than any other boy in my room."

PICTURES

FELLOWS, I haven't the space to tell each one of you what pretty pug noses you have, and so on and so forth. But I will thank each of you separately for the fine pictures sent to me. I sure love boys. And I prize your pictures. I hope you'll send more.

I have pictures here of the following boys:

Pat Bourke, Memphis, Tenn.

Bob Reilly, Chicago.

Nat E. Adamson, Jr. (also Pa Adamson and a younger brother), Portsmouth, Va.

Joseph Church, Tiverton, R. I.

Gordon Casello, Port Huron, Mich. (A tent is shown in the background in which Gordon and his fellow Goldfish have their meetings in the summer. In cold weather, he says, the meetings are held in his home.)

Willard Vitense (and his dog), Madison, Wis.

Dick Cox, Salt Lake City.

Clark Streeter (two views), Atlantic, Mass. (Clark's grandma recently told him he was too old to read Jerry Todd books. She wanted him to start reading classics. Poor Clark! He finally wrote to me, telling me his troubles—and would I *please* write to grandma and explain to her that books that made boys giggle were good for boys. So I wrote to grandma! And I guess I convinced her that boys, to grow up right, needed to do a lot of giggling. For now Clark is happy in having his grandma's consent to read all the Jerry Todds he wants to.)

Myron Coleman (two views), New York City.

Garland Ross, Jr., Martinsville, Va.

Murrill Cornell, Chicago.

Jack Sutton (two views), Woodbury, N. J.

Bill Veenstra, Paterson, N. J.

Norman Salshutz, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Ford Crook, Robards, Ky.

Raymond Gilman, Plainfield, N. J.

Also, Ray (1144 Stilford Ave.) contributed this poem:

The Ghost Killer

Jerry Todd was a daring lad.
He had the ghosts all hoppin' mad
When he went into the cemetery.
And now comes the part that's really scary!
He went up the hill to the queer old manse
And kicked a ghost in the seat of its pants.
He poked his fingers in another's gizzard,
And then they all thought he was a wizard.
At the station he met Poppy and Mr. Lorring, too.
But when they heard his story they said it wasn't true.

Raymond Bourlier, Marlette, Mich.

Eddie Smyth, New York City.

William Schreiter, Walpole, Mass.

Charles Holaday, San Antonio, Texas.

William Todd, Jr. (and his pal, Pat Kennedy), Wildwood, N. J.

A fine bunch of pictures, all right—or, to speak more properly, a fine bunch of pictures of a fine bunch of boys. I sure am proud of my writing job when I thus see the kind of boys who are reading my books.

LEO'S PICTURE

AND now, gang, I have some good news for you. An autographed picture of Leo Edwards—in person—may be obtained by writing to Leo Edwards' secretary, Grosset & Dunlap, 1140 Broadway, New York, N. Y., and enclosing 10 cents in stamps to cover cost of handling. Modesty prevents me from telling you, fellows, that this is a rare bargain. Only 10 cents for such a wonderful picture! Ahem!

FRECKLED GOLDFISH

THE Club News that I had planned to put in this issue will have to carry over. For I dare not make this "Chatter-Box" any longer. For full information on our Goldfish Club, turn to the announcements in the "Chatter-Boxes" in any of my late books. Then, if you aren't a member, hurry up and join. The club is a "fun" proposition; and we have funny membership cards, fancy buttons, initiation rituals and everything. Thousands of boys have joined; hundreds have organized branch clubs.

Write to me often. The oftener the better.

Leo Edwards,
Cambridge,
Wisconsin.

LEO EDWARDS' BOOKS

Here is a complete list of Leo Edwards' published books:

THE JERRY TODD SERIES

Jerry Todd and the Whispering Mummy
Jerry Todd and the Rose-Colored Cat
Jerry Todd and the Oak Island Treasure
Jerry Todd and the Waltzing Hen
Jerry Todd and the Talking Frog
Jerry Todd and the Purring Egg
Jerry Todd in the Whispering Cave
Jerry Todd, Pirate
Jerry Todd and the Bob-Tailed Elephant
Jerry Todd, Editor-in-Grief

THE POPPY OTT SERIES

Poppy Ott and the Stuttering Parrot
Poppy Ott's Seven-League Stilts
Poppy Ott and the Galloping Snail
Poppy Ott's Pedigreed Pickles
Poppy Ott and the Freckled Goldfish
Poppy Ott and the Tittering Totem

THE ANDY BLAKE SERIES

Andy Blake
Andy Blake's Comet Coaster
Andy Blake's Secret Service
Andy Blake and the Pot of Gold

THE TRIGGER BERG SERIES

Trigger Berg and the Treasure Tree
Trigger Berg and His 700 Mouse Traps

The following titles are in preparation:

Jerry Todd, Caveman
Poppy Ott and the Prancing Pancake
Poppy Ott Hits the Trail
Trigger Berg and the Sacred Pig
Andy Blake, Boy Builder

CONTENTS

ANDY BLAKE AND THE POT OF GOLD

CHAPTER I

A PUZZLING COMMISSION

THE heat of a midsummer morning lay heavy in the lofty office building where Andy Blake had done such excellent work in the beginning of his advertising career. Later, as we know, the young advertising man had left Chicago, after a brief two years there, locating in Manton, a typical Illinois manufacturing town, where he now held the responsible position of sales promotion manager of the Boy Products Company, a comparatively new concern specializing in juvenile vehicles, chiefly coaster wagons, known to the trade as Comet Coasters.

A striking name indeed. And one (originated by the young sales promotion manager) that had enabled the company to make rapid strides forward. But this success did not satisfy Andy. He longed to achieve still greater merchandising

victories in the great lanes of industry. And having started the new company on the road to success he now had his mind set on a city job. Chicago! That, he told himself in his characteristic impatient way, was the home of big business. And it was of big business (the bigger the better!) that he longed to be a part.

So as our story opens we find him on his way to Chicago to confer with his former employer, Mr. Milo Rollins, the guiding genius of one of the city's foremost advertising agencies.

A warm-hearted, hard-working, high-strung boy, neat in appearance, with a round friendly face and eager brown eyes, Andy had found a sincere friend in the great advertising leader. Very human himself, Mr. Rollins had been strangely drawn to his bright-eyed young assistant. He liked the younger one's intense industry and admired his fine character.

The Rollins agency was a large concern. It handled some of the biggest advertising accounts in the Middle West. Men of genius were needed here. And Mr. Rollins was confident that Andy possessed the necessary genius, though, of course, it was a thing to be developed. Moreover, the bright boyish face would be a pleasing addition to the creative staff.

Seated at his desk, in the comparative quiet of his private office, high above the roar of the city's traffic, Mr. Rollins sighed as he considered the

situation. He wanted Andy near him. But it was his intention to send the impatient young job hunter back to Manton. There were reasons why it had to be done.

Determined not to be inconvenienced by the increasing midsummer heat, the executive again studied the two personal communications that he had received that morning, the first a letter and the second a lengthy telegram. The letter interested him. It brought up pictures of his youth. He saw himself again a tousle-headed, barefooted boy, racing across a meadow made sodden by a recent downpour. A great colorful bow spanned the heavens. And how great had been his youthful disappointment, imaginative youngster that he was, when the bow melted away before he had located the fabled pot of gold.

A drenched meadow . . . a golden sun peeping through tumbling clouds . . . the drone of distant diminishing thunder . . . and the colorful arch with its fabled treasure! An appealing picture. But rainbows had no bearing on business success. The dreamer had found that out. Yet, after all, was his reflective thought, as he looked forward to the coming interview with his young friend, wasn't life made sweeter and more worth while by combining the imaginative with the real?

Somehow at that moment the gray stone walls that rose without his windows seemed very

material to him. He thought longingly of fauns and fairies. That rain-drenched meadow . . . the wind in his tanned, rugged face . . . flowers blooming in the fence corners . . . a scuttling rabbit . . . the drenched singing trees . . .

Again he gave his attention to the telegram, reading it carefully. And now he smiled. The adventures amid rainbows and accompanying fabled treasure that were denied him he would pass along to another. Even more than smiling, he chuckled as a plan quickly took shape in his mind.

A neatly attired girl came quietly into the room.

"Oh, Miss Manning," the executive lifted his dark eyes.

"Yes, Mr. Rollins," spoke the private secretary.

"I'm expecting Mr. Blake this morning. Please see that nothing is said to him about this telegram."

"I understand."

"And show him in as soon as he arrives."

"Very well, sir."

Andy appeared in the outer office shortly after ten o'clock, having caught an early-morning train out of Manton.

"Hi," he grinned boyishly at the information girl, as he swung through the doorway. "How

are you and Mr. Bell's clever little invention getting along?"

Everybody liked Andy. And not infrequently the girls with whom he came in contact regarded him with wistful eyes. But he had no favorites. All wrapped up in big business ideas, girls occupied only a secondary place in his life.

"I was expecting you," was the telephone clerk's beaming reply.

"Then you *did* listen in yesterday afternoon when I talked with Mr. Rollins on long distance?" the visitor joked.

The girl's eyes danced.

"Of course not, silly. But news travels. Are you coming back, Andy?" she inquired eagerly.

He was sober now.

"I'd like to," he spoke simply.

Miss Manning then took him in charge.

"You're to go right in, Andy. Mr. Rollins said so."

"I hope he comes back," the clerk spoke to the secretary, when the door of the manager's private office had closed behind the appealing young visitor.

But Miss Manning made no reply. Keen business woman that she was, and familiar with the contents of the telegram that had been tucked away in the manager's desk, she anticipated his decision. For she knew his ways. Andy, she

felt quite sure, much less than being offered a position in the agency, would be encouraged to return to Manton and continue his present work. Yet, womanlike, she wondered, with mounting curiosity, how her clever and resourceful employer would handle the situation. For it would be a mistake to dampen the young man's intense enthusiasm.

It never occurred to her, though, that the great man of business had been thinking of rainbows!

"I'm more glad to see you, Blake, than you realize," Mr. Rollins spoke feelingly to his beaming visitor, following a hearty handclasp. "Sit down, my boy. I have something to tell you. And if you will accept the commission that I have for you I'll forever feel indebted to you."

Commission!

"I was not without hope, sir," Andy further beamed, as he attached a meaning of his own to the word, "that I'd be able to——"

Mr. Rollins quickly got the situation in hand.

"How's business?" he cut in brusquely.

"Fine and dandy," was the younger one's spirited reply.

"Selling lots of coaster wagons?"

"Thousands of them."

The executive smiled.

"And what's the secret of this great success?" he joked.

"We have a good product, to begin with,"

Andy spoke earnestly. "Then, too, the youngsters seem to like the idea of our Comet Coaster Club. We have over a thousand branch clubs organized now."

"And are you still publishing the little magazine featuring Trigger Berg?"

"Sure thing. We had to increase our run last month to twelve thousand copies, so great is the demand for the magazine. And had you heard, Mr. Rollins, that the man who writes the Trigger Berg stories for us has put Trigger into a series of books?"

"How interesting!"

Andy laughed.

"I have a hunch that Trigger and his skylarking pals are going to make us famous. For, of course, the small boys who read these books will prefer Comet Coasters."

"Still living at the Y.M.C.A.?" Mr. Rollins then inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"Are you familiar with your own town, Andy?"

Which, the boy thought, was a peculiar question. And he wondered, as he curiously searched the executive's face, if it had anything to do with the mentioned "commission."

"I have a relative living in Beeker Street," Mr. Rollins went on. "And if it wouldn't inconvenience you, Andy, I'd like very much to have

you make your home with her for a few months."

The visitor was staring now.

"But I thought—" he began, meeting the elder's eyes.

Mr. Rollins hid a smile. For he knew very well indeed what was going on in the younger one's mind.

"Miss Minnie Andrews is a charming lady. A cousin of mine. Quite wealthy, as I understand it, and a bit old-fashioned. You'll like her. I saw a great deal of her in my youth, for I frequently visited in Manton. I may not have mentioned that to you," the executive concluded with a smile.

Andy was still staring.

"No," he found his voice. "You never said anything about it to me."

"Of course," the executive went on, "great changes have taken place in the town since I knew it. Old landmarks have disappeared. But the house in which I spent many happy hours still stands. I am referring to Miss Andrews' home in Beeker Street. Possibly you know the place—a big wooden house, rather rambling, and probably still painted white."

"No," Andy slowly shook his head. "I can't recall that I ever heard of a street by that name."

"Nevertheless there is such a street," the executive insisted. "And you'll find, on investigation, that the house is rather outstanding. It

was built by my uncle and aunt. . . . Do you know anything about spiritualism, Andy?"

"No, sir," the words were spoken wonderingly.

"Well, it was my aunt's queer belief that she would live again in spirit form after the change called death. So prepare yourself! When you have taken up your residence there, it isn't at all improbable that you'll find yourself rubbing noses with spirits, not only the spirit of my eccentric aunt, but that of old Mrs. Weedon as well."

Andy pinched himself to make sure that he wasn't dreaming. And having satisfied himself on that point he was more bewildered than ever.

"But I don't understand—" he began.

"Mrs. Weedon," the executive informed, "was a neighbor woman. She, too, was a spiritualist. Living side by side, and sharing the same religious beliefs, it is natural that the two old women should become cronies. I'm quite sure that Mrs. Weedon shared my aunt's secrets. And it is entirely probable, too, that my aunt shared her neighbor's secrets, including the hiding place of the Maharaja's mechanical goose."

Andy felt weak, so overwhelmed was he by the situation. Mr. Rollins talking about spirits and a mechanical goose! It was beyond comprehension. Yet, in a way, the younger one realized that added surprises were in store for him. And he realized, too, that there was purpose in the elder's words.

"As a boy," Mr. Rollins went on, "I spent many exciting hours searching for the lost goose. It had coil springs in it, I was told. And when it was wound up it laid golden eggs. You can imagine how eager I was to find it! The goose and my unsuccessful quests for it were recalled to my mind this morning when I received a letter from my cousin. . . . Blake, I want you to help me find that goose."

"Yes, sir," Andy spoke weakly.

"A heavy stockholder in one of our most promising accounts, the American Toy Company, you will readily understand my eagerness to recover the goose. If the mechanism can be copied, and the goose manufactured in quantities, we'll have a toy that will sweep the country. A duplicate of the Maharaja's famous goose! Can't you see the appeal there, Blake? It will be an outstanding advertising campaign."

Andy gave a queer laugh.

"It's hard for me to believe that you're in earnest, Mr. Rollins."

"Yet the story interests you," the words were spoken eagerly.

"Oh, very much so—what little I understand of it."

"Let me go into details: As I say, it is very probable that old Mrs. Weedon knew the truth about the goose's disappearance. As a girl she lived in a tavern conducted by her father, Pegleg

Blair. A brother of Pegleg's, a rascally rover who favored the sea in his youth, stole the mechanical goose from a Hindu temple. The goose was held in great reverence by the superstitious natives, who credited it with miraculous powers. But it was nothing more than a clever piece of machinery, conceived and built, after years of painstaking work, by a certain very wealthy Maharaja, who undoubtedly possessed one of the keenest mechanical minds of his time. To perform its tricks the goose, of course, had to be supplied with the necessary golden eggs. An even dozen of them! A treasure, Blake. Old Pegleg kept the goose in an iron chest. One night the chest was opened. And it was the daughter's story the following morning that she had hidden the goose in her sleep. She recalled the act, she admitted, but couldn't remember where the goose had been put away. Well, as you can imagine, there was an exciting search. But the goose never was recovered. The daughter having taken up spiritualism in all its queer phases, it was the belief of many of the neighbors that the girl had hidden the goose, not in her sleep as she declared, but because of the insistence of some domineering spirit—possibly the spirit of the Maharaja himself! Later she married a man by the name of Weedon, from whom she inherited considerable wealth. She and my aunt were great cronies, as I say. What was

known to one was known to the other. So you can see the job that is cut out for you, Blake: I want you to get in touch with my aunt's spirit. Find out from her if she knows where the goose is hidden. And once you have recovered it, bring it to me, eggs and all. I'll see that you are properly rewarded."

Andy was now thinking of himself. And he was peculiarly disappointed.

"I had intended to leave Manton," he confessed simply.

"But why should you do that? You have a splendid position. It affords exceptional opportunities for development. I think you should stay where you are, Blake."

"I think I shall," grinned Andy, coming to a quick decision, "now that I have heard about the goose."

"Fine!"

"Will Miss Andrews be expecting me?"

"I'll give you a letter of introduction."

"And you really believe," the speaker curiously searched the other's face, "that I'll come in contact with your aunt's spirit?"

Mr. Rollins leaned over his big desk.

"Blake," he spoke solemnly, "that house is full of spirits."

There was a reckless boyish laugh.

"I accept the commission, Mr. Rollins."

Andy rightly felt that peculiar experiences lay

ahead of him. And he was happy in knowing that he was rendering a service to a friend. His own disappointment was forgotten.

Yet the commission puzzled him. It seemed so *unlike* Mr. Rollins. Spirits and a trick goose that laid golden eggs! Regular fairy-story stuff.

"But I can see why he wants the goose," Andy reflectively addressed himself that night on the train, as it carried him homeward. "And I'll do everything in my power to recover it. But I can't imagine that I'll meet with success."

The young traveler wondered, too, if spirits and ghosts were the same thing!

And now, to make every part of our story clear, we must go back to the early spring and pick up the adventures of Tom Flannigan and his parentless sister and younger brothers.

For they, too, had heard about the Maharaja's famous mechanical goose and were trying to find it.

CHAPTER II

AN ANGRY NEIGHBOR

JESSIE FLANNIGAN, a pleasing, bright-eyed, home-loving girl of fifteen, was singing over her task of dusting the sitting-room furniture when a shadow darkened the cottage doorway.

The song came to an abrupt end. And the little housekeeper's deft hands betrayed the nervousness their owner felt as the identity of the unexpected visitor became known.

It was Miss Minnie Andrews (Jessie's younger brothers called her "the skinny old maid") who lived in the big house next door.

"I have a notion to report your brothers to the police," cried the angry neighbor. "For see what they have done to my poor cat."

Black ink circles about the snow-white animal's eyes gave it the quaint appearance of wearing spectacles.

Jessie stifled a gasp.

"I'm dreadfully sorry, Miss Andrews," she faltered, wondering whether she should defend her younger brothers or call them into the room and charge them with their guilt. Her face was

grave now, and worried. "It's hard to keep boys out of mischief," she added, nervously feeling about in her mind for some sort of an excuse, or explanation, that would tend to placate the angry neighbor. Then a happy thought came to her. The preceding week she had used sour cream in removing ink stains from one of her gingham dresses. It *might* work on cats. "If you'll let me take the cat I'll see that the ink is removed," she offered, sincerely eager.

But the indignant maiden lady held the treasured pet tightly in her thin arms.

"Your brothers need a good flogging. They do nothing but rear and tear about the neighborhood, annoying people and destroying things. If they dare to enter my yard again," came the final heated threat, "I'll have them arrested."

Jessie sighed as the front gate clicked behind the angry complainant. Then, as a telltale snicker came from the kitchen, she grimly threw open the connecting door, thus surprising her younger twin brothers at the keyhole. Her sudden appearance sent them over backward onto the kitchen floor. But before they could scramble to their feet and run away she had a firm hold on their shirt collars.

"Ouch!" cried Royal, squirming to loosen his sister's grip. "You're pinching."

"You need something worse than pinching," scolded the indignant housekeeper. "For I've

told you time and again to keep away from her and quit pestering her."

"We didn't harm her old cat," sputtered Royal, whose striking red hair had gained for him the nickname of Rusty.

"Of course not," sided in Ralph, also red-headed, but who was distinguished from his equally freckled twin brother by the nickname of Turk, or Turkey Egg.

"But you've made her angry," continued Jessie, "and she'll talk about us to the neighbors. Oh, dear!" the girl sighed. "Why can't you be good boys and keep out of mischief, instead of making it so hard for me? Just wait till Tom comes home at noon and hears about this!"

Rusty scowled through the open door at the adjacent white house.

"She's an old crab," he growled. "She's had it in for us ever since we moved here."

Which, in a way, was true. For Miss Andrews, obsessed by the selfish fear that five motherless and fatherless children would naturally create disturbances to annoy and inconvenience her, had indeed resented the appearance of the Flannigan flock in her immediate neighborhood.

The Flannigan children had moved to Manton that spring. Upon the death of the widowed mother, Tom Flannigan, a sturdy, steady boy of sixteen, had elected to take his younger sister and brothers away from the hard life of the con-

gested city, because the responsibility of keeping the little family together rested upon his firm young shoulders. He rightly felt that the problem would be less complex in a small town where one could raise garden truck and keep chickens.

Early in April the city dray with its load of shabby furniture had drawn up in front of the Weedon cottage. This was the first that Miss Andrews knew that she was going to have neighbors in the low-roofed dwelling that adjoined her extensive town property. Watching from behind the ruffled curtains of her living room, she wondered apprehensively if all of the children belonged to the new family. She hoped not! And where was the father and mother? The following morning she sharply ordered Royal and Ralph from her fence, telling them to remain on their own side. Yet within an hour she had discovered them astride the peak of her aged barn. Since then they had given her many unhappy and wholly indignant moments.

The trouble was that the maiden lady let herself believe—made herself believe, in fact—that the Flannigan twins were bad, destructive boys, whereas they were only high spirited and mischievous. Now she was filled with bitterness over the trick that they had played on her beloved cat. It was the final straw! She would buy the Weedon cottage, she told herself, and thus get

rid of the objectionable Flannigans for all times.

Later that morning she appeared in a downtown real-estate office.

"I want to see Mr. Lind," she told the keen-eyed secretary, who carried the message into the pursy realtor's private room.

Grasping and unscrupulous by nature, Mr. Olaf Lind was secretly hopeful that whatever business had brought the unexpected visitor into his office would result in a fat commission. For he knew how wealthy she was. So, in offering her a chair, he made a great show of politeness.

Seating herself in her characteristic prim way, the visitor began:

"I called to see you about the Weedon property."

A crafty light came into the realtor's eyes.

"Oh! . . . You yust git a fine idea to buy it —what?" he massaged his fat hairy hands.

"I may buy it if the price is right," Miss Andrews stated with reserve. "What are you holding it at?"

Well informed on the prices and values of local real estate, Mr. Lind knew that the visitor's possession of the Weedon tract would in no definite measure add to the value of her own property. As a matter of fact she now owned more land than she could properly care for. So if she was sincere in wanting to buy the adjoining property, he figured out in his crafty way, she had

reasons that did not appear on the surface. That being the case she probably would be willing to pay a fancy price. Earlier he had offered to sell the cottage for fifteen hundred dollars. Now he stated, with crafty deliberation, that he was holding the property at three thousand dollars.

The visitor stiffened, fully aware of the fact that the unscrupulous dealer was trying to take advantage of her.

"That is entirely out of reason. I feel the place should be bought for less than two thousand dollars. I was prepared to offer sixteen hundred."

The realtor arched his shaggy eyebrows.

"My goot lady! We can't gif the property away. Of course," he conceded, "the house is in poor condition——"

"It's falling to pieces," came tartly.

"—but the soil is rich, the location is goot, and the lot is big like two lots."

The woman got to her feet.

"Sixteen hundred is my offer. I'll not go a cent higher."

Left alone, the foxy realtor sat in thoughtful silence. At length he gave a throaty chuckle and called to his secretary.

"Katie! Did you hear what she say?"

"The door was open, Mr. Lind."

"I tink we sell her the Weedon property priddy quick."

"Sixteen hundred is a good price for it."

"Ho, ho, Katie! You tink I sell for sixteen hundred? Oh, no! Tell me, is it true what I hear about the young Flannigan twins being such bad boys?"

The girl considered.

"I don't know as you would call them bad boys. They don't do vicious things. But they're into more mischief than any other two boys in the whole town."

The man gave a satisfied nod.

"And maybe they make it priddy lively in their own neighborhood—what?"

The girl's eyes slowly searched the other's.

"You think Miss Andrews intends buying the Weedon cottage to get rid of the Flannigan children?"

There was another throaty chuckle.

"Katie, what a fine head it is you have for business."

"She'll never pay you three thousand," declared the girl.

"Pshaw, Katie! I've bin tinkin' I made the price too low. I should have said five tousand."

"You must be intending to hypnotize her," laughed the girl.

"A fine scheme I have, Katie. Tell me, have the Flannigan boys a dog?"

"Not that I know of."

"It is a great fondness that I have for lively

"GO GET HIM, BING!" CAME THE COMMAND.

Andy Blake and the Pot of Gold. *Page* 28

boys. Maybe I gif the Flannigans a fine dog. A barking dog, Katie."

The girl understood.

"Miss Andrews will indeed have nervous prostration with a goat on one side of her and a barking dog on the other."

An eager light jumped into the man's narrowed eyes.

"A goat you say, Katie?" he wheezed, leaning forward.

"You should see it! Mr. Allen bought it for Buddy. But it's so vicious they have to keep it shut in the garage."

The man laughed heavily.

"Katie, I should buy this goat for the Flannigan boys; but that would be too wicked."

CHAPTER III

BING AND THE GOAT

THAT afternoon Jessie Flannigan was standing in the cottage doorway when the portly real-estate agent came within sight in the shaded street. At dinner she had joined Tom in lecturing the twins for inking the neighbor's pet cat; and now, as she observed the man wheel and turn in at the front gate, her heart gave an apprehensive bound.

Had the agent received a complaint from the angry cat owner? And had he come to order them out? Such were the disturbing questions that flashed into the girl's mind. So it isn't surprising that her hands trembled as she opened the screen door.

The wheezing visitor seated himself in the room's biggest and most comfortable chair.

"Goot afternoon, Miss Flannigan," he mopped his moon-like face with a soggy handkerchief. "I yust dropped in like a neighbor to see how you are gitting along." His crafty eyes roved about the room. "Very cozy, I see; and it's a fine little housekeeper that you are, with tings

so neat like wax. Very soon now I have the carpenter come out and fix the holes in the roof."

"Tom fixed them," Jessie informed.

"Your brother Tom is a very fine boy," the man complimented, nodding his big head in what was intended to be a friendly way.

Having no reason to doubt the other's sincerity, the relieved girl permitted a warm light to enter her eyes.

"I'm glad you like Tom," she spoke feelingly. "For he's the most wonderful brother in the whole world. When mother died they were going to send us to an orphans' home. But Tom wouldn't hear to such a thing. There never was a brother like him, Mr. Lind. I can't praise him enough."

The visitor gave another friendly nod.

"You have two younger brothers, I believe."

"Three," corrected Jessie. "My youngest brother Bennie," she spoke in a quieter voice, "is a cripple. His spine has been crooked since he was a baby. He walks with a crutch. Some day, when we have the money, we're going to take him to a doctor in Chicago."

These pathetic details did not interest the selfish man. But he was willing to play the hypocrite to serve his own ends.

"It is sad," he sympathized, rolling his fat-ringed eyes, "that your little brother should be a cripple." And to let no doubt of his sincerity

creep into the other's mind he heaved a deep stomachy sigh. Then, anxious to center the conversation around the twins, he proceeded: "A nice yard this is for boys to play in. So big is it, and so roomy."

Jessie suffered a touch of renewed anxiety.

"It's hard to keep boys in their own yard, Mr. Lind," she thus prepared herself for possible complaints.

"Not if they have a dog," came the quick response.

"A dog?" Jessie repeated, searching the speaker's face.

"Very fond I am of boys," continued the crafty visitor. He leaned forward. "I tell you what you do, Miss Flannigan: Have your young brothers come down to my office to-morrow morning. Maybe a fine dog I will gif them."

Jessie could hardly believe her ears.

"Every boy should have a dog," declared the man, beaming magnanimously at the surprised girl. "Maybe I should gif your brothers two dogs—what?"

"I think," laughed Jessie, in a scattered way, "that one will be a great plenty."

She pinched herself to make sure that she wasn't dreaming. People had told her that Mr. Lind was as "tight-fisted" as he was fat. He never would repair the leaky cottage roof, they had declared. His sudden and wholly unexpected

burst of generosity was, to say the least, overwhelming. It left her dazed.

When the waddling visitor had taken himself away she corralled her three younger brothers and told them of their good fortune. As can be imagined the boys were wildly jubilant. The fun they would have with their new dog! Even little Bennie momentarily forgot his disease-touched spine and tried to emulate the monkey-shines of his older brothers as they rolled and tumbled in the grassy yard.

"Oh, baby!" laughed Rusty. "I guess that old maid's cat will have to hunt a hole now."

Jessie stiffened.

"Yes, you would like to start some more trouble."

"It won't be our fault," Rusty gave himself an innocent air, "if our dog chases her cat up a tree."

"And bites its tail off," supplemented Turk hopefully.

"We'll teach the dog not to chase cats," said Jessie.

"Aw. . . . Who wants that kind of a dog?"

"That's the kind of a dog we're going to have," Jessie said firmly.

"I still can't understand why Mr. Lind offered us the dog," Turk spoke thoughtfully.

"I'm beginning to think myself," put in Rusty, "that there's something the matter with it, or

else he wouldn't give it away. For everybody around here says he's the biggest tightwad in town."

"His offer was a big surprise to me," admitted Jessie. "But probably he likes us better than we suspected."

The following morning the twins went early to Mr. Lind's office, returning with a lanky, rangy Collie that had the unhappy appearance of being half-starved. Yet to Rusty and Turk, Bing was the finest dog in the whole world. They showered him with affection and scoured the neighborhood for bones to feed him. In the days that followed a pleasing contentment settled about the animal. It even lost its lanky appearance and became plump and glossy.

Miss Andrews was fearful as June advanced that the Flannigan boys might take a notion to raid her much-prized cherry tree. The elderly woman loved this tree. It seemed to be a definite part of her life scheme, her father having planted it on her twentieth birthday. Seldom did the tree fail to produce a yearly crop of delicious blood-red cherries. No other tree in the town equaled it in the quality and quantity of its fruit. This year, having delighted its mistress with a profusion of fragrant blossoms, the tree set its green globules and daily the proud owner watched the fruit swell and change in color to a deep, dark red.

For sentimental reasons she liked to pick her own cherries. So, one sunny morning when the breakfast dishes were washed and put away, she appeared in the yard with a long stepladder and several small pails. Rusty and Turk got their eyes on her as she positioned the ladder and climbed to the top. It would be nice, the boys thought, their mouths watering, if they had a similar tree on their own side of the fence.

Suddenly Turk clutched his brother's arm and pointed to the street in front of the big white house.

"Look!" he cried. "There's Buddy Allen's goat coming through her front gate."

"I bet Buddy doesn't know his old goat's loose," said Rusty.

"Look at him butt that elm tree!" cried Turk. "Cracky! I wouldn't care to have him butt me."

Rusty wondered then what would happen if the goat and the cherry picker got sight of each other.

"If she sees him, she'll screech. You know her, Turk. And then he'll come tearing across the yard and upset her."

"Tee-hee!" giggled Turk.

Rusty scowled.

"How do you get that way?"

"It'll be funny," said Turk, "to see the goat ram into the stepladder."

"Huh!"

"The old crank! I guess she'll get her pay now for jawing at us."

"What if she gets a fall and breaks her neck? I suppose that would be funny, too."

Turk's unimportant reply trailed away when a shrill scream came from amid the foliage and fruit of the cherry tree. The goat was now close to the stepladder. Watching the animal's every movement the boys knew from the way it held its whiskered head that it was getting ready to charge.

And Miss Andrews knew it, too!

Suddenly Rusty leaped into action. "Here, Bing!" he cried. Dozing on the front porch, the faithful Collie sprang up at the call of its master's voice and bounded forward. Tearing a picket from the old-fashioned fence the boy headed the dog into the adjoining yard. "Go get him, Bing!" came the command. "Get him, old fellow!"

Rusty thought that the goat, thus attacked, would run away. But it didn't. Instead, it backed against the trunk of the cherry tree, from which position it made repeated furious lunges at its barking antagonist.

"Say, Miss Andrews," cried Rusty, realizing that the stepladder was liable to be upset any moment, "we'll come over and drive the goat away if you won't arrest us for being in your yard."

As the boughs parted the boys caught sight of a frightened white face.

"If you'll come and drive the goat away," screamed the trapped cherry picker, "I'll give you a dollar."

What followed was great sport for the boys. There was much skirmishing and side-stepping. And watching from the top of the wabbly ladder the maiden lady thought that each moment would be her last. In all her life she never had experienced another such fright as this.

"Now!" cried Rusty. "Grab him by the whiskers."

"Ouch!" squeaked Turk, as the active goat got a crack at him.

"Grab him!" screeched Rusty.

"Grab him yourself," squealed Turk.

"I've got him!" cried Rusty. "Now help me drag him out of the yard."

Upon the boys' return the cherry picker came down to earth.

"I'll go in the house and get the money," she stated, trying to appear very short and crisp. But this was not easy. For her usual quota of dignity had deserted her.

Rusty ran his fingers through his hair. And watching him it suddenly occurred to the neighbor woman that there was a good look in his freckled face.

"I guess you needn't bother to pay us the

dollar," he decided, speaking manfully. "We'll sort of call it square. And you needn't ever worry about your cat, either. For our dog doesn't chase cats."

Turk was squinting into the laden tree.

"Say, Miss Andrews, can't we pick your cherries for you?" His eyes danced with eagerness. "We won't eat any. Honest we won't."

The woman was still trembling. She realized that it would be hours, possibly days, before her nerves were fully quieted. Therefore someone else would have to pick the ripe cherries.

But could she trust these awful Flannigans? It was hard for her to give in.

Shortly before twelve o'clock Tom Flannigan came briskly down the street on his way home to dinner. Observing his brothers in the cherry tree he ran into the yard to drive them from the forbidden territory, but was restrained by a quieting voice from the shaded back porch where the tree's owner sat pitting cherries.

"Don't get excited, young man," Miss Andrews told the bewildered newcomer. "Your brothers aren't trespassing. As a matter of fact we have taken down our 'no trespassing' signs."

There was much in the situation that Tom didn't understand. But at the moment a great burden was lifted from his mind. For the woman's earlier unfriendly attitude toward her

young neighbors had troubled him. He was that kind of a boy.

"Miss Andrews," he cried impulsively, "I found out something this morning that I think you ought to know. While I was washing the windows in Mr. Lind's office I overheard him tell another man how he was planning to swindle you. He didn't come right out and call it a swindle—he spoke of it as a clever deal and laughed about it—but it is a swindle. He thinks he can get you to pay him a big price for our cottage to get rid of us. That is why he gave Bing to the boys—just to make it noisy around here. I hadn't thought about the dog being a bother to you. But if it is——"

"Hi, Tommie!" cried Rusty, running up the porch steps with a pailful of red fruit.

"Goodness gracious!" cried the woman. "What in the world am I going to do with all these cherries? I can't use a third of them." Her eyes turned to the neighboring cottage where Jessie Flannigan was at work on the kitchen porch. "I wonder," came the tactful inquiry, "if your sister would mind if you took some of these cherries home with you?"

Rusty rubbed his empty stomach.

"Cherry pie!" he smacked. "Um-yum-yum!"

As the three brothers trailed out of the yard, the younger ones chattering and the elder listen-

ing attentively, each with a heartful of love for the other, the woman followed them with grave, thoughtful eyes.

"They're not bad boys at all," she mused. "They're just full of life—only I've been a good many weeks finding it out. I tried to make myself hate them; and I very nearly succeeded. Now, wasn't I the silly piece!"

CHAPTER IV

TOM MEETS MR. GREENOR

IN BRINGING his little "flock" to Manton, Tom Flannigan had planned on getting steady work in one of the town's numerous factories. But in this he had met with disappointment. For the factories had all the boys they needed. Only older and more experienced workmen were in demand.

But the young provider was not discouraged. Denied steady factory employment, he industriously sought out such odd jobs as mowing lawns, spading gardens and repairing window screens. He also brightened many porch floors with new paint, giving satisfaction in all of his work. In April he earned thirty-three dollars. In May, the "house-cleaning" month, he did considerably better. Nor did he at any time complain to his sister and younger brothers of a tired back and aching muscles. For in the face of the family's need of money he was only too glad to have the work to do.

"But I'd be a whole lot easier in my mind," he confided to his sister, "if I only had a steady

job. Then we could lay up something for a rainy day."

The sitting-room clock having struck nine-thirty, the twelve-year-old twins and little Bennie were asleep in their beds.

"How about the stores?" suggested Jessie.

Tom had thought of that. But in his love for mechanical things he had set his heart on a factory job. Besides, it was his impression that he could earn bigger wages in a factory.

Jessie read his thoughts.

"A store job," she counseled wisely, "will tide us over till something better turns up."

"But we can't live on eight dollars a week," he remonstrated, feeling certain that no storekeeper would offer him more than that, inexperienced boy that he was.

The little housekeeper gave a merry laugh.

"Eight dollars a week will buy *heaps* of soup meat and beans. Just leave that part to me! And I'm not so sure that we won't be able to have steak and pudding on Sunday."

There was in Tom's heart a tremendous affection for his bright-eyed, cheerful sister. He realized her important part in his home-making plans. And just now he impulsively got up from his chair and came around the center table to where she was sitting, an incompleted darning job in her lap.

"You're a wonderful little pal," he murmured,

awkwardly resting one hand on her shoulder. "The best cook," he bragged, "and the neatest housekeeper in the whole country. Some day," and his voice grew warmer as he forgot his boyish embarrassment, "I'm going to have a real job. We won't have to scrimp then and worry over each penny. Not that *I* mind the scrimping," he added hastily. "But I sure do wish that you could have nice things. You work so hard and have so little!"

"I have four fine brothers," reminded Jessie, steadfast in her loyalty.

"But brothers don't make up for the lack of pretty dresses," persisted the sober one. "You would enjoy wearing nice clothes if you had them."

"Of course," Jessie admitted slowly. "I would be a queer girl if I didn't. But I know what I can afford. And I try not to envy the other girls their pretty dresses. To do so would only bring me unhappiness."

The following morning Tom appeared in the store of the Greenor Clothing Company in search of employment. This was the largest store of its kind in the town, employing a number of clerks of different ages.

Mr. Greenor, middle-aged and seasoned in the world of business, removed his nose glasses and quietly regarded the young applicant with observing, appraising eyes. He approved of

Tom's neat appearance, though the worn suit did not escape his attention. His interest was centered not so much in the boy's clothing as in the earnest expression of the firm young mouth and the energy reflected in the clear blue eyes.

"Yes," he stated slowly, "we have an opening for a boy of your age. But the job has been promised to the son of one of my business acquaintances."

Tom showed his disappointment.

"You might leave your name and address with me," the merchant suggested. "For it isn't improbable that the Lind boy will soon tire of his summer job."

Tom's interest quickened.

"Henry Lind?" he questioned.

The man nodded.

"Do you know Henry?" he inquired.

"Yes," Tom spoke slowly, dropping his eyes, "I know him."

And that noon he confided to Jessie:

"I know things about Henry Lind that Mr. Greenor doesn't know. But I kept still."

"Is Henry a bad boy?" inquired Jessie, as she busied herself at the stove.

"There isn't a meaner or trickier kid in the whole town."

"He must take after his father," reflected Jessie, recalling how the unscrupulous real-estate agent had tried to swindle their wealthy neigh-

bor. Then she added: "Did I tell you that Miss Andrews had a business caller yesterday afternoon?"

Tom searched his sister's face.

"You mean Mr. Lind?" he guessed.

Jessie nodded.

"He's still trying to sell her this cottage. But she gave him to understand that she isn't interested."

"Good for her!" chuckled Tom.

"You will be pleased when you hear how she got rid of him," laughed Jessie.

"How was that?" came the quick inquiry.

"She asked him if he had any more 'barking dogs' to give away."

"I bet he wonders," said Tom, "where she got her information about the 'barking dog.' "

"Let's hope he doesn't find out," shrugged Jessie. "For then he would be down on us."

Here the conversation was interrupted by the clatter of young feet on the kitchen porch. A moment later the twins tumbled into the room, accompanied by their frisking pet.

"Hi, Tommie!" greeted Rusty, beaming at his beloved older brother. "Bet you can't guess what we're going to do with Bing."

"Tell me," grinned Tom, "and I promise to be as excited as you are."

"We're going to put him in a show and win a prize."

Tom was puzzled to understand what the younger one was talking about.

"A show?" he repeated.

"There's to be a boys' pet show at the Y.M. C.A. A sign in front of the 'Y' tells all about it. I asked the man at the desk if it would cost anything to enter Bing. He said it wouldn't."

"But we've got to build a cage for him," supplemented Turk. "The man said so. It's one of the rules."

"Is Buddy Allen going to enter his goat?" laughed Tom, when it was further explained to him that the show was open to all kinds of boys' pets.

The twins weren't sure about the goat.

"We should urge Miss Andrews to enter her white cat," joked Jessie.

Rusty shook his head.

"It isn't for women," he explained.

"Of course not," followed up Turk, with an important gesture. "It's just for boys."

Friday morning the patient Collie was coaxed into a tub of soapy water, for this was the day of the wonderful pet show. Then, fearful that their immaculate pet would get dirty if allowed to run loose, the twins led the dog to the Y.M. C.A. building, hauling the required cage on a coaster wagon. That noon they gave their sister and brothers an enthusiastic account of what was going on at headquarters.

"You never saw so many dogs and cats in all your life," laughed Rusty.

"And there's a little alligator," put in Turk. "It belongs to Harold Dahlen. His uncle sent it to him from Florida. Harold's got a peachy scar where it bit him."

Jessie shuddered.

"And there's rabbits," continued Rusty, "and guinea pigs and a yellow hen that does tricks, just like that Waltzing Hen in the Jerry Todd book."

Turk thought of something.

"Who owns the spotted pony?" he inquired of his brother.

"The curly-headed kid."

"Wish we owned it," Turk said longingly.

"What!" spoke up Jessie in surprise. "Do they admit horses?"

"Why not?" countered Turk. "A pony's a pet, isn't it?"

"Of course," the sister admitted. "But I thought they would draw a line on such big pets." Then she inquired: "How does Bing compare with the other dogs?"

The twins bubbled over with enthusiasm.

"Bing's got them all beat, Sis," declared Turk. "He's the classiest dog in the whole show."

"Isn't that fine!" cried Jessie, her eyes shining happily. For whatever interested her brothers interested her.

"I never saw such a change in a dog," spoke up Tom, thinking back to the morning when the dog had been introduced into its new home.

Rusty scowled.

"The Linds were mean to him, I bet."

"He certainly was half starved when we got him," nodded Jessie earnestly.

Turk laughed.

"I tell Rusty we're sure to get a prize. For Mr. Lind is one of the judges. He ought to favor Bing."

"How many judges are there?" inquired Tom.

"Three. The mayor is the chairman of the committee. The other member is a storekeeper . . . runs a big clothing store on the corner by the drinking fountain."

"Mr. Greenor," Tom supplied.

"That's the name," waggled Turk.

"He's a fine man," said Tom warmly. "I've met him."

CHAPTER V

AN UNWARRANTED ATTACK

"Say, Pop," Henry Lind informed his father that evening at the supper table, "the Flannigan kids have got our old dog down at the 'Y.' "

The father gave a scornful, stomachy laugh. "They tink a prize old skin-and-bones will git for them—what?"

"But he isn't skinny like he used to be."

The parent showed surprise.

"No? Well, I gif him some inspection tonight. Maybe, if I tink I can sell him, I take him back."

"I wish you would," Henry urged eagerly. "For I hate the Flannigans."

A kindly woman by nature, and very unhappy in her home life, Mrs. Lind was distressed by her son's remark. But when she attempted to correct him he turned on her angrily.

"Why shouldn't I say that I hate the Flannigans? For I do. And so does Pop. I heard him say so last night. So jump on him for a change."

The realtor suddenly lost interest in his food.

"That Tom Flannigan I will git even with, and don't you forget it," he growled, his big face darkening with anger. "For a tattletale he is, and a sneak, to interfere with my business. Oh," he ground his teeth, like a trapped wolf, "I find out a few tings how he go and tattle to Miss Andrews and spoil my sale! But yust wait! I will fix that young smart aleck."

"Why don't you order him out of the cottage?" Henry suggested craftily.

"What!" exploded the man, staring at his offspring. "A fool you tink I am to lose six dollars a month, which is rent? Such a hollowness you have in your head! Very glad will I be when Mr. Greenor puts you to work in his store. Maybe when you git some business in you, you will learn to talk sense a little bit and not so much foolishness. Six dollars is six dollars. I let nothing git away from me. That is how I make a success of my business, which it will pay you to copy a little bit."

Henry became inquisitive.

"Say, Pop, is the rent yours?"

"What rent?"

"The six dollars that you get from the Weedon cottage."

"Why do you ask that?" the parent evaded.

"Oh, because. I just wondered if old Mrs. Weedon willed the house to you when she died."

A bell tinkled in the hall.

"Go answer the telephone," came the gruff command, "and quit talking foolishness about wills which you know nothing about."

Mrs. Lind's eyes were worried as she regarded her flushed husband across the table.

"I wish you would try and find the Weedon heirs, Olaf. You should. It is your duty."

The man scowled.

"Must I bring before your very eyes the son's corpse to convince you that he is dead?"

"But surely there are other heirs. And you should make some effort to find them. It is dishonest of you not to do so. I worry, Olaf. For someone is liable to learn the truth about the Weedon estate."

Henry thrust his head through the doorway.

"It's a call from the Y.M.C.A., Pop. They want you to meet the judging committee at seven-thirty."

That evening Mr. Greenor's little daughter accompanied him to the pet show. And as he and the other judges made the rounds of the exhibited pets the child clung to his hand.

"Oh, Papa!" she cried, with dancing eyes. "See this beautiful Collie. His hair is like silk. Won't you please buy this nice doggie for me?"

"I'm afraid, dear, the boy who owns this dog would object to parting with it, for boys love their pets."

Rusty and Turk stepped forward.

"He's our dog, mister," Rusty informed proudly.

The man smiled warmly into the boy's beaming face.

"A splendid animal," he complimented. "May I inquire if he is for sale?"

"We hadn't thought about selling him," Rusty faltered. "And for that matter no one has wanted to buy him. But I guess we would sell," he concluded, looking at his brother, "if someone offered us a good price."

A judge of dogs, Mr. Greenor knew the Collie's value. Nor was he the kind of a man to take advantage of an uninformed boy.

"Would fifty dollars interest you?" he inquired.

Fifty dollars! Rusty and Turk looked at each other, both of the same thought.

"You can have him for fifty dollars," Rusty decided. "For we need the money worse than we need a dog."

A few minutes later the excited twins got their eyes on their older brother.

"Look, Tommie!" cried Rusty, flourishing a piece of paper. "We've got a fifty-dollar check."

"And Bing was awarded a blue ribbon," cried Turk.

The curious eyes of the observing throng embarrassed Tom. And unable to quiet his excited brothers, he drew them into an unoccupied side

room. It was here that the grasping real-estate man found them.

"It is cheats you are," cried the angry man. "My dog you would sell for fifty dollars and keep the money."

Tom was surprised.

"You have no claim on the dog, Mr. Lind," the boy spoke sensibly. "You gave it to my brothers. If they want to sell it, the money is theirs."

"Robbers!" screamed the man, with mounting anger. "You gif me that fifty dollars," he threatened, crowding the younger one into a corner, "or the worse it will be for you, you tattletale."

Tom slowly shook his head. Then, as an attempt was made to grab him by the throat, he let his strong young fists shoot out in self-defense.

"Go for him, Tommie!" screamed the excited twins, as the aggressor staggered back with a bruised nose. "Clean up on him, Tommie! Smack him another one on the snoot!"

There was murder in the brutal man's bloodshot eyes.

"Gif me that money," he cried hoarsely, his ham-like hands working convulsively.

"I won't," panted Tom. "It isn't yours. It's ours."

"Gif me that money," the command was repeated.

"I won't."

Snarling, the man again attempted to close in on the boy, but divided his attack when the twins leaped on him from behind.

Then a door opened.

"What's the meaning of this?" cried the amazed mayor, coming quickly into the room.

With flashing eyes and quivering muscles Tom told his story. And in the dead silence that followed the defeated real-estate man slunk from the room.

"We'll see that he doesn't bother you any more," Mr. Greenor assured the Flannigan boys, when Tom told the merchant that the dishonest man was their landlord. "If he orders you to move, you can depend on us to help you find another suitable home."

"I rather imagine," the mayor spoke up, anxious to end the unfortunate affair, "that he will be heartily ashamed of himself when he cools off and only too glad to drop the matter."

"He'd better," scowled Rusty. "For if he gets funny with us, old Tommie will knock his block off."

Mr. Greenor smiled.

"I'm of the opinion," he told Tom, "that I'd rather have you in my store than the Lind boy. So, if you wish, you may report for work next Monday morning."

CHAPTER VI

THE BLUE ELEPHANT

TOM had been working for the Greenor Clothing Company two days when he found the two-dollar bill on the floor behind the wrapping counter. The cash register was close by. So he promptly came to the conclusion that in hurrying to make change the preceding afternoon the cashier had unknowingly brushed the paper money from the cash drawer to the floor.

It was the new employee's duty to come early to the store to sweep the floor, uncover the merchandise counters and generally get things in nice shape for the day's business. So he was alone in the store when he found the money.

His first thought was to return the recovered bill to the cash register. But on brief reflection he decided not to do that. For he had no business opening the money drawer. It would be best, he decided, to keep the money until he had a chance to return it to the cashier. Anyway, the register was probably locked. So he tucked the bill into the breast pocket of his shirt and went on with his work.

That forenoon Mr. Greenor gravely inquired of the cashier:

"How about the two-dollar bill?"

"It's gone," shrugged Mr. Grady.

"And hasn't it been turned in?"

"No, sir."

The merchant's steady eyes sought out the new clerk at the pressing table in the rear of the store.

"I'm sincerely disappointed," he confessed to his associate. "I was in hopes that he would turn out to be an honest boy."

Contrary to the merchant's suppositions Tom had no dishonest intentions. He had forgotten about the money in his shirt pocket. Had he remembered that the money was there he would have promptly returned it to the cashier.

What occupied his mind instead of the recovered money was his work. It was new to him and he gave it his complete attention, for he wanted to succeed.

An older clerk was teaching him how to use the store's heavy pressing iron.

"You're doing fine," the instructor praised.

"Is this going to be my regular job?" grinned Tom, sucking a blistered finger.

"You're starting in where we all did," explained the clerk cheerfully.

Tom interpreted this as meaning that if he

continued to apply himself, and did well, he would earn promotion.

"I'm going to do my best," he told himself, bending earnestly to the task before him.

That noon he bragged to Jessie.

"You should have heard the praise I got this morning. From the head clerk, too."

Jessie's eyes twinkled.

"What!" she cried, pretending surprise. "Have they asked you already to become an officer in the company?"

Tom strutted.

"Mr. Halley says I'm the raspberries."

"You mean gooseberries," laughed Jessie.

Tom took her by the ear.

"Look here, young lady," he said severely, gritting his teeth. "You better be careful how you make fun of me. For in the dignity of my position of—ah—head pants presser I might take a notion to turn you over my knee and spank you."

But he quickly backed away when Jessie threatened to smear his nose with her sticky mixing spoon.

"Um-yum-yum!" he smacked, glancing around the kitchen. "I smell something good."

"It's my bread," informed the little housekeeper, pointing to the browned loaves on the cabinet. "I had good luck with it to-day."

"You always have good luck with it," bragged Tom loyally.

"It's a good thing," said Jessie, "that I don't believe all you tell me. For if I did I'd be terribly conceited. One day it's, 'Gee, Sis, you sure know how to fry potatoes . . . brown and crispy.' And the next day it's, 'Gee, Sis, you sure know how to bake swell apple pie.' Now it's my bread. Soft-soaper that you are, anybody would know, all right, that you're Irish."

"How about yourself?" laughed Tom.

"Our name gives you away," Jessie laughed in turn, "The 'Flannigan flock!' That's what the neighbors call us."

"Just so they don't start calling us the Hibernian herd," joked Tom.

A racket in the yard without the kitchen door announced the arrival of the twins. Having spent the morning fishing in the near-by river they were tired and nearly famished.

"New bread!" yelled Rusty, getting his eyes on the browned loaves. "Whoopee!"

"And pickles!" Turk noisily joined in.

"No," Jessie stopped them, "you can't sit down to the table with those dirty hands. How *can* you think of doing such a thing—after handling angleworms! Boys certainly are a puzzle to me. Go to the sink—both of you. Nor need you be afraid of the soap. For that's one thing we have plenty of even if we are poor."

In drying their hands the famished pair left dirty streaks on the kitchen towel. But instead of scolding them for their carelessness, which added to her work, the little housekeeper patiently contented herself with the thought that she wouldn't always have small brothers. She loved them too well to want to nag at them.

Tom was setting the chairs around the table.

"Where's Bennie, Sis?"

Jessie turned quickly, forgetting her work.

"Have you any money, Tom?" she inquired.

The provider emptied his pockets onto the kitchen table.

"Here's thirty cents," he grinned.

The girl showed her disappointment.

"But it will take at least two dollars," she said.

Tom was sober now.

"Is there something you particularly need?" he inquired.

Jessie ran into her story like the impulsive girl that she was.

"I want to have a picnic dinner for Bennie. To-morrow is his birthday . . . he'll be nine. And all he talks about is fancy sandwiches and a birthday cake with candles on it and ice cream. Having set his heart on going up the river, he thinks he'll be able to play hard to-morrow by resting to-day. That's why he went to bed. And he has the blue elephant in bed with him." There

was a painful silence. "Oh, Tom," the big-hearted girl went on, "I can't bear to disappoint him. Think how little he has. Isn't there some way we can spare the money?"

Tom passed silently into the bedroom that he shared with his baby brother. Here he found the little fellow stretched out upon the bed before a darkened window. And at the moment it seemed to the older one that the sleeping child's frail body was more wasted and more twisted than ever. It grieved the boyish guardian anew.

"Oh, Bennie," he murmured out of his steady, loving heart, "if only I could make you well!"

Then he noticed the blue elephant. And at sight of the china toy his misery deepened. For he could imagine the pained disappointment that would come into the baby's eyes when he awakened to a realization of the Good Fairy's unfaithfulness.

It had started as a game—this thing of calling on the Good Fairy of the blue elephant in cases of need. The twins knew, and Tom and Jessie knew (although Bennie did not) that there was no magic connected with the china toy. And when the dimes that the sister needed for a fancy ribbon were found in the hollow of the elephant's back, the happy girl knew that her brothers had earned the money and placed it there. Yet the game carried a pleasing thrill. It bound closer

together the hearts and lives of the little "flock."

And now the one true believer of them all, the cherished baby brother, must learn, of necessity, that the Good Fairy was not the infallible friend that he thought. And in consequence the game would lose for the youngest one its fascinating mystery. For there would be doubt in the baby's mind hereafter. The thought sickened Tom. But he was powerless. As he had told Jessie, all the loose money that he had was the silver on the kitchen table. And he knew that this insufficient sum would not lessen the child's disappointment.

Then, his thoughts turning, the older brother slowly straightened. He seemed to stiffen—to grow cold. His right hand slowly sought the breast pocket of his shirt. The forgotten two-dollar bill! No one knew he had it, for he had been alone in the store when he picked it up. Suppose . . .

But to keep the money would be wrong, and the tempted one knew it. No matter what justification he built up in his mind for the act, he would be none the less of a thief. A shiver ran through his body. A thief!

No! He couldn't—he wouldn't—bring himself to do it.

As he turned away his foot scraped against the leg of a bedroom chair. And having awakened, Bennie sat upright and rubbed a pair of

sleepy eyes. Then he cried his beloved brother's name in happy recognition.

"Dinner's ready," said Tom with forced cheerfulness, reaching down to take the crippled one into his strong young arms.

"Wait a minute, Tommie," and there began an eager search on the coverlet for the cherished toy. "I want to get my money—my picnic money."

The cry of disappointment that ended the search was more than the faithful older brother could endure.

"Why, Bennie!" he exclaimed. "There *must* be some money hidden there. For the Good Fairy wouldn't desert you. A little fellow like you! I should say not. See! There *is* some paper money here in the corner. A two-dollar bill. You overlooked it, sweetheart."

Bennie hugged the toy and the money to his jumping heart.

"It's my picnic money, Tommy. The Good Fairy brought it."

Tom carried his excited brother to the table in the kitchen where the twins were already completing their hurried noonday meal. But for the older one the carefully prepared food had lost its usual flavor. And he was glad to get away from the house.

Jessie, though, didn't notice, so happy was she over the coming picnic.

Tom was not the first boy who had been put to the Greenor Clothing Company's "honesty" test. Other new employees had found money on the floor, for this was a stock trick of the careful manager to determine the honesty of the people he employed. In most cases the money had been promptly returned, for it is to the credit of boys in general that the big majority of them are honest. The exceptional boy, of course, was summarily dismissed.

Yet Mr. Greenor was reluctant to thus dispose of Tom's case. Familiar with the boy's straitened circumstances, he hated to tell the young worker that he was discharged. Still, he asked himself in defense of his customary practice, what else could he do and thereby keep faith with his business principles? Certainly, the new clerk had proved himself dishonest by keeping the two-dollar bill. That entitled him to curt dismissal.

Unquestionably the merchant's kindly heart would have been touched could he have known of Tom's mental wretchedness that afternoon. To the tortured boy it seemed that the despicable word "thief" was written all over him in letters of fire. Nor could he, in his shame, bring himself to look his fellow clerks or his employer in the face.

That night he was a long time getting to sleep. In his troubled wakefulness he paced the bed-

room floor. Thief! Thief! The horrible word seemed to reach out of the darkness and take hold of him with a branding touch. He was a thief. All of his life he would be a thief.

By mutual agreement Manton's stores and business houses closed on Thursday afternoons, thus providing the employees with a welcome weekly half holiday. So at twelve o'clock the following day Tom hurried home to find Jessie locking the doors and windows. The twins, she informed, had impatiently gone on to the river with their loaded coaster wagon, taking little Bennie with them.

Borrowing a boat and oars from one of the neighbors Tom quietly rowed his little family up the river to where a grass-carpeted knoll invited the picnickers to land and spread out their lunch. To the lively twins it was a feast indeed. Jessie laughingly scolded them for eating so much. She told them that they would be so full of sandwiches and pickles that they would have no place for the ice cream that was to be served later.

"Don't fool yourself," grinned Rusty, letting out his belt.

Tom ate in silence. Troubled by his conscience, his usual cheerfulness had deserted him. Nor could he force himself to take part in the fun.

It was a scorching hot June day. And during

the heat of the afternoon the twins put on their bathing suits, cooling their browned bodies in the sluggish stream. While thus engaged two canoeists, a woman and a little girl, came into sight from the direction of town.

"It's Mrs. Greenor," Tom told his sister.

"Isn't she pretty?" said Jessie.

"I wish *we* had a canoe," Turk spoke longingly.

"They're watching us," said Rusty. Like most small boys he dearly loved to show off. "Let's climb that tree, Turk," he suggested, pointing to a huge elm that grew over the water, "and show them what swell divers we are."

As the two browned bodies struck the water simultaneously the little girl jumped to her feet, clapping her hands.

"Oh, Mamma!" she cried. "It's the boys who owned Bing. It's the Flannigan boys, Mamma."

The mother cried to the excited child to sit down, for the canoe was trembling dangerously. Then, despite the elder's efforts to keep it balanced the frail craft dipped water, which so frightened the child that she fell into the stream.

Having witnessed the accident, and unwilling to depend on his younger brothers to render the required assistance, Tom jumped to his feet and jerked off his heavy shoes. Running into the river he swam with powerful strokes to where

the woman was clinging to the capsized canoe. She was able to care for herself, he saw, so gave his attention to the child. Diving, he got hold of the little one's dress and raised her to the surface.

The twins in the meantime had helped the woman ashore. Nor did she lose her head, as many another mother would have done under the same circumstances. She was waiting at the water's edge when Tom staggered to shore with his dripping burden.

There were some anxious moments. But the child, having swallowed only a small amount of water, soon revived.

"Oh, Mamma!" she cried. "I'm all wet. My pretty dress is ruined."

"Never mind the dress, Pet. I'm only too thankful that you are alive."

The story of Tom's heroism having been told to Mr. Greenor by his wife, the merchant went directly to the cashier the following morning.

"Mr. Grady, I've changed my mind about discharging the Flannigan boy. For I am under deep obligations to him. When you pay him off to-morrow night please make it ten dollars instead of eight, which was the amount that I promised him when I hired him."

At ten-thirty Saturday night the store was closed for the week. Tom hurriedly covered the

merchandise on the counters and went to the cashier for his week's pay.

"But it should be only eight dollars," he told Mr. Grady, thinking that the man had made a mistake in handing him two five-dollar bills.

"Mr. Greenor instructed me to pay you ten dollars instead of eight," the cashier informed.

Tom couldn't understand.

"But why is he paying me more than he promised?"

The man looked steadily into the flushed face.

"Mr. Greenor is a very fair man, Tom. He likes to pay his people what he feels they are worth. Evidently he has a great deal of confidence in you and feels that you will develop into the kind of a young man the store needs."

Poor Tom!

"I don't deserve it," he huskily told the cashier, resting a trembling hand on the other's steady arm. "For I've been dishonest. I took money from the store. I didn't want to do it; I knew it was wrong. But it was Bennie's birthday——"

Mr. Grady's hand closed warmly over the boy's.

"If I were you," came the kindly counsel, "I would go to Mr. Greenor and tell him the truth. I'm sure he'll understand. And I think you will feel better if he knows. . . . Good night, Tom."

Lights were burning in the Greenor home when a boy ran up the porch steps and rang the doorbell. The man of the house himself answered the late call.

"Mr. Greenor," Tom burst out, "I stole two dollars from you and I want to pay it back. I found the money on the floor near the cash register. It's the first thing that I ever stole in all my life. And I never want to steal again. For I've been in misery."

"Tom," said the composed merchant, when the boy further explained why he had kept the money, "you have made me very happy by telling me this. I know now that you are honest and deserving of help. Your future in the store is much brighter."

The emotional boy gripped the friendly hand that was held out to him. Then he ran away into the night, into the shadow of the sleeping trees and the deep silence of the deserted streets, for his eyes were heavy with tears.

CHAPTER VII

THE KITE KARNIVAL

One noon at the dinner table Tom told his sister and brothers about the new suggestion box that Mr. Greenor had put up in the store.

"What's it for?" inquired Turk, who, as usual, was hurrying with his food, anxious in this particular case to get back to work on a huge kite that he and his twin brother were building on the narrow back porch.

Rusty looked up from his plate.

"I bet I know," he spoke in his characteristic bright way.

"Well," grinned Tom, "we're listening."

"It's a box for the store clerks to put suggestions in."

"That's the idea exactly," nodded Tom. "Mr. Greenor is offering a weekly prize of two dollars for the most practical suggestion turned in."

"Pretty soft for you," grinned Turk, who by nature was more nonsensical than his twin brother. "For all you've got to do when you want a raise in pay is to write it down on a piece of paper and put it in the suggestion box."

"Yah," Tom grinned in turn. "I *would* get a two-dollar prize for that kind of a suggestion—like so much mud."

He then explained that the prize-winning suggestion had to be something in the way of an idea that would help to build up the business.

"Mr. Greenor gave us a nice talk when he called us together and explained about the suggestion box," the young clerk went on. "He stated that the success of the business rested mainly in our hands. If we were to get sloppy and careless in our work, or talk sassy to customers, we'd give the store a black eye. And should the business fail, he said, we'd all lose our jobs. So the proper thing for us to do, he advised, was to get the feeling of ownership. Then we'd begin to think up little schemes to help the business along. And the suggestion box is a means of getting these ideas before the attention of the management."

Jessie had been an interested listener.

"Are you going to try to win a prize?" she inquired.

"And why not?" Tom laughed.

Turk's eyes were full of mischief.

"Let me suggest something," he put in eagerly.

"Well, dish it out," encouraged Tom.

"Get up some kind of a spelling contest. See?

And every kid who spells mouse trap with three letters gets a big dish of ice cream."

"Since when," said Tom, searching the freckled impish face, "did you develop an interest in spelling?"

"It's a riddle," grinned Turk.

"And what's the answer?"

"C—a—t."

There was a general laugh.

"I'm afraid," said Tom, "that Mr. Greenor wouldn't be interested in riddles. Unique window displays and catchy selling schemes is what he's after."

Jessie wanted to help.

"If I were you," she advised, "I'd forget about window displays, for the older clerks know a great deal more about that than you. . . . Have you a boys' department in the store?"

"Sure thing."

"Well," said the bright girl, "there's your chance."

"Meaning which?"

"You're a boy yourself and know how boys think and act. So why don't you figure out some way of attracting other boys to the store, through a special sale or in a general way?"

Tom saw big possibilities in his sister's suggestion. And his eyes were full of admiration as he met hers across the table.

"This morning," Jessie went on, "I overheard Mrs. Allen starting Buddy off by himself to buy a necktie. I dare say he stopped at the first clothing store he came to. But if he had been interested in Mr. Greenor's store that's where he would have gone; and that's where he would coax his mother to trade."

"Say, Tom," Rusty then inquired, more interested in his own affairs than in those of his older brother, "do you know anything about kites?"

"I never made but two in my life," Tom admitted.

"Did you ever see Henny Lind's big kite?"

"No."

"He claims that it's the best kite in town. But it won't be when we get ours finished."

"How does he act toward you?" Tom was reminded to inquire.

"As smart as ever. But I don't think he cares a rap about you getting his job. At least he never said anything about it to us."

"I can't expect you to let him walk all over you without sticking up for your rights," Tom spoke thoughtfully. "But please don't ever pick a fight with him."

"I wouldn't pick a fight with anybody," Rusty declared stoutly.

"Considering how his father hates us," added Tom, "the wonder is to me that we haven't been ordered out of here. And that's why I'm par-

ticularly anxious not to have any more trouble. For I don't know where we'd move to if we were forced to leave here."

"I doubt if Mr. Lind could rent the cottage to anybody else," Jessie spoke up, "for it's an old rattletrap."

Tom looked around at the dingy walls and cracked ceiling.

"I wonder what he paid for the place."

"It isn't his," Jessie informed. "He just has the renting of it."

"Who told you that?"

"Mrs. Allen."

"The neighborhood kids say that a funny old woman by the name of Mrs. Weedon used to live here," Turk put in.

"And did you hear, too," laughed the sister, "that the 'funny old woman' was a miser?"

"Hot dog!" cried Turk, instantly excited. "Maybe we can find some hidden money. Come on, Rusty."

Jessie stopped the twins before they got to the cellar door.

"There isn't an inch of the cellar floor that Mr. Lind hasn't turned up a dozen times—which explains why the cellar was in such a mess when we first got here. So don't imagine that you boys will find anything."

"I often wondered," said Tom, "what made the cellar floor so rough."

"Following Mrs. Weedon's death," Jessie further informed, repeating the story that she had heard from the neighbors, "Mr. Lind spent countless hours here, digging in the cellar and pounding holes in the plastered walls. I doubt if a single dollar of the woman's hidden wealth escaped him."

"And he has it all?" inquired Tom, his dislike increasing for the dishonest realtor.

"So the neighbors say."

At the conclusion of the noonday meal Tom went outside to help his brothers with their kite.

"What!" he cried in amazement, when he saw their material. "Are you going to use those long sticks?"

"And why not?"

"But they're so big and heavy."

"They're no bigger than the sticks in Henny's kite," declared Rusty.

"You'll need a gale," laughed Tom, "to fly this kite."

Turk then brought out a ball of twine.

"A man at the linen mill gave it to us last week for helping him. He says it'll hold a hundred pounds."

"I was going to suggest that you use a clothesline," was Tom's added laughing remark.

Opening his jackknife he carefully shaved the sticks until they were as small and light as he dared to make them. Then, when Jessie re-

minded him from the kitchen door that it was after one o'clock, he brushed his clothing and hurried away to the store, where, after a lot of thinking about kites and boys, he approached the cashier with a suggestion.

"Boys spend a lot of money for clothing, Mr. Grady. And if we can induce them to buy their stuff here, by interesting them in the store, they'll probably keep on buying from us when they grow up."

The man gave an encouraging nod.

"Right now," added Tom, "the town boys are all excited over kites. I saw a dozen in the air this noon. So why not take advantage of this interest and have a kite karnival, offering prizes to the boys whose kites make the best showing? We can advertise the kite flying contest in the newspaper, explaining that boys who wish to enter the contest must come here to register. The cost won't be great. And it ought to do the store a lot of good."

"Fine!" congratulated the cashier. Then he handed the beaming boy a slip of paper. "Make a detailed note of your suggestion, Tom. It sounds good to me. And here's hoping that it wins the first two-dollar prize."

When Mr. Greenor opened the suggestion box a few days later and found Tom's kite karnival suggestion he promptly sought the cashier.

"Grady, that Flannigan boy has good stuff in

him. He's a thinker. This suggestion of his carries a splendid merchandising thought. I've always felt that we were overlooking a vital factor in the building up of our business by not definitely attracting the town's youth. It will pay us, as Tom points out, to get the young people to thinking about us in the right way. Read what he says. I think the suggestion will appeal to you in the same measure that it does to me."

The cashier grinned like a pleased boy, for he liked Tom.

"I know all about the proposed kite karnival," he confessed, further explaining how the young clerk had come to him with the suggestion.

"Certainly it is worth trying," decided the merchant. "As the stores are closed next Thursday afternoon we'll arrange to have the karnival then, advertising it in Saturday's newspaper. I probably can induce the Y.M.C.A. secretary to act as judge, for he's all wrapped up in boys. And the kite karnival ought to be fun for all of us."

"And do I pay Tom the two dollars?" inquired the cashier.

"Of the several suggestions in the box, his is the best," stated the merchant.

The following day Mr. Greenor telephoned to the Y.M.C.A., inviting the secretary, Mr. King, a young man of pleasing personality, to have lunch with him at the country club. During the

course of the meal the merchant outlined the plan that he had in mind.

"It would be my idea," he explained, "to offer about four prizes, possibly for the kites that fly the highest and those put into the air a stipulated height the quickest. As the boys all know you, and have a great deal of confidence in you, I would like to have you act as judge."

Having learned in working with boys that the best way to keep them out of mischief was to keep them busy, Mr. King was very eager indeed to see Mr. Greenor's plan go through, for it supplied an added youthful interest.

"It's a fine idea," he complimented warmly, "and I'm wondering if we can't make it a regular weekly feature. We might have model airplane races, too."

"By George!" cried Mr. Greenor, with sparkling eyes. "That gives me an idea. Instead of selecting prizes from the store, as has been suggested, I'll buy each of the four prize winners a toy airplane."

"Nor are you the only one who has an idea," laughed the secretary. Then he leaned forward confidentially. "For some time I've been trying to interest Colonel Dickey in our local boys, figuring that if he once realized the good that we are doing among the boys he would help us out financially. But he's an eccentric old codger, as you probably know. I fear he hasn't much confi-

dence in my contention that boys are really useful in the great scheme of things. He seems to think that boys are more of a nuisance than otherwise, and not to be trusted in a broad sense. I know for a fact that he never would spend a penny to help reform bad boys. That's his odd temperament. But I have been in hopes that I could get his backing on the basis of making our good boys better, for it's just as important to keep boys good as it is to reform them."

Mr. Greenor gave a thoughtful nod.

"The Colonel has a tremendously warm heart, once his emotions are aroused, though usually he hides his finer character under a shell of reserve."

"Last month," the secretary continued, "I thought I had him won over, having talked 'boys' to him till I was blue in the face. Then a couple of young imps made a raid on his prized strawberry patch—and I'm right where I was in the beginning. But unless I succeed in separating him from some of his idle dollars I'm afraid the Boy Scouts will have to forego the promised camping trip, however much it may disappoint them and handicap our scouting program. For we have less than fifty dollars in the treasury."

"But what has this to do with the proposed kite karnival?" Mr. Greenor inquired curiously.

"It would help my cause a great deal, I feel, if I could bring the impulsive old gentleman and my young charges together. So let us invite him—

urge him, if necessary—to help with the kite contest. Make him one of the judges. Let him see for himself what fine material we have in our boys. He then should be willing to help them."

Mr. Greenor found his companion's enthusiasm infectious.

"It so happens that Colonel Dickey is one of my warmest friends. I'll drop in and see him this evening."

CHAPTER VIII

THE FLYING GORGON

IT TOOK the Flannigan twins several days to complete their huge kite. In fact they were still working on it when Jessie observed the kite karnival announcement in the Saturday evening newspaper.

"Oh, look!" she cried, pointing to the advertisement. "The Greenor store is going to have a kite karnival at the Bloomfield meadow next Thursday afternoon. Tom's name is mentioned. See? And old Mr. Dickey is the chief judge."

Rusty gave vent to his hilarity by turning a flip-flop on the soft earth.

"Oh, boy!" he cried. "Here's where we clean up on Henny Lind, for his kite will be a back number when ours takes the air. I bet we outfly every kite in town."

Henry, too, had seen the announcement in the evening newspaper.

"Evidently," he spoke to his father, "Tom Flannigan thinks that the big kite his brothers are building will beat mine, for that's why he got up

this kite karnival. But I'll show him a few things about kite flying next Thursday afternoon."

Mr. Lind scowled darkly.

"A good lesson these Flannigans need," he growled. "to make them with less smartness. Maybe, Henry," he added craftily, "a quarter I gif you for a present if you beat them like a prize winner."

Learning that the Flannigan twins were going to try out their new kite the following Monday morning, Henry, like the sneak that he was, hid in the bushes near the Bloomfield meadow. And how he chuckled to himself when the huge kite, after lifting itself dispiritedly into the air, turned with a capricious flip of its ragged tail and darted back to earth, where its disappointed owners had a difficult time extricating it from a tree.

"Some kite!" ridiculed the spy.

But he jeered too soon, for the kite performed perfectly when another length of knotted cloth had been added to its tail. Again on Tuesday and Wednesday the watcher lay in hiding, hopeful that an accident would happen to the hated kite. And on Thursday, the day of the contest, he came early to his hiding place with an air gun. For he knew that if he didn't cripple the big kite the victory that he coveted would be lost to him. Like his father, he had no principle.

Rusty and Turk were amazed when their kite

began to quiver, never suspecting, of course, that it was being peppered with shot.

"Pull it down!" cried Rusty.

But he spoke too late. The kite came down of its own accord, a broken, useless thing. And with sad hearts and long faces the twins carried the wreckage home.

Miss Andrews was genuinely disturbed by her young friends' misfortune. Then, as an idea came to her, she regarded the long-faced boys with twinkling eyes.

"When my cousin was a youngster, long before he went to Chicago to live, he won a kite flying prize, and it seems to me that I saw his kite a few years ago when I was ransacking the attic. If it's still there you're welcome to it."

Hopeful, the boys followed her up the steep attic stairs.

"There it is," she pointed.

To get a better look at the unusual kite the the twins carried it to a window.

"What's its name?" inquired Rusty.

" 'Flying Gorgon,' " read Turk.

"Isn't it hideous?" said Miss Andrews. And a shiver ran through her frail body as she glanced at the painted paper face with its crest of coiled serpents.

"I think it's beautiful," he fondled the kite with loving hands.

"I never saw a kite like it," said Turk.

"Nor me," answered Rusty.

"And you say it won a prize, Miss Andrews?"

The woman nodded.

"As I recall it won several prizes."

"Hot dog!" cried Turk. "We'll beat the Lind kid after all."

That afternoon boys by the dozens trailed out of town in the direction of the Bloomfield meadow, where, at two o'clock, the contest officially began, Mr. Greenor having turned the affair over to the two judges.

Many years had passed since Colonel Dickey had taken part in a kite flying contest. And at times the old gentleman's fingers twitched impatiently, so eager was he to get possession of the control string of one of the kites. He wished he had a kite of his own! Once, like an impetuous boy, he broke away from his elderly companions and hobbled stiffly across the meadow to help a tousled youngster get his kite into the air.

Which, as can be imagined, was all very pleasing and promising to the scheming secretary.

Tom was too busy handling the crowd to pay much attention to his own brothers. And when it came time for them to fly their kite in competition with dozens of others he was sent to town on an errand.

So he knew nothing about the prize-winning Flying Gorgon until he saw it that evening on the back porch.

The twins were walking on air, so elated were they over their victory.

"Look us over!" strutted Rusty, patting himself on the chest. "We got the head prize. And was Henny Lind ever sore! If our new kite had been a ghost, his eyes couldn't have stuck out any worse when we brought the Flying Gorgon onto the field."

"Flying Gorgon?" repeated Tom, with a puzzled face.

"There it is," pointed Rusty. "Miss Andrews gave it to us this morning. Didn't I tell you that we broke our big kite? Something happened to it. And when Miss Andrews heard of our hard luck she gave us this kite. Her cousin made it years ago. Isn't it a beauty, Tom? It's made of Japanese paper. See? Miss Andrews painted the Gorgon's head herself when she was a girl. Why, Tom! What's the matter? You look funny."

Tom put a firm hand on the smaller one's shoulder.

"You cheated," he spoke in a tense voice.

Rusty was taken by surprise.

"Me?" he stared.

"Yes, you," Tom nodded.

The younger brother's temper asserted itself.

"You've got your nerve," he jerked himself away, "calling me a cheat."

"You are a cheat," declared Tom. "The con-

test was open to boys *who made their own kites.* You didn't make this kite."

Rusty's anger melted away. And when he spoke there was visible distress in his young face.

"I—I never thought of that," he faltered.

"Mr. Greenor and Mr. King are having supper with Colonel Dickey," said Tom. "While they're all together, I think you and Turk had better go over there and explain the situation."

"Oh, I hate to," Rusty spoke miserably. "They'll think we cheated purposely."

"If you tell them the truth, they will believe you," said Tom. "I've found out that men are willing to believe in boys if the boys themselves are on the square."

So the twins set forth on the unpleasant errand. Crossing the wide lawn that surrounded Colonel Dickey's old-fashioned home, they mounted the front steps. Called to the door, the housekeeper explained to the young visitors that the Colonel and his friends were closeted in the library. And later, while the boys were waiting in the hall where the mellow light of a fading day sent shadowy elves dancing out of the corners, they could hear voices in a near-by room. The Colonel, after a happy afternoon, was responding warmly to the secretary's appeal for financial assistance.

It was dark when the guests left. So the house owner failed to observe two boyish forms on the hall divan as he brushed by them on his way to

the front door. About to close the door and lock it for the night, he was accosted by Henry Lind, who came running up the steps.

"Those Flannigan twins are liars and cheats," cried the newcomer. "They never made that crazy kite of theirs at all. I told Pop about it. And he said it's a kite that Milo Rollins made when he was a boy. Probably they got it from the old maid who lives next door. You've got to go after them and make them give up the head prize, for it's mine and I want it."

And these, thought the impulsive old gentleman, as a peculiar coldness crept over him, were the kinds of boys he had been intending to help. Liars and cheats! He had the unpleasant feeling, as he recalled the recent discussion in the library, that he had been tricked. He had been led to take an interest in boys, with the assurance that all boys were deserving. And now it would appear that his earlier view of boys was correct. He trembled with mounting anger. Camping trip, indeed! There would be no camping trip if *he* financed it, for plainly boys were undeserving of any such generosity.

He stiffly assured Henry that the misunderstanding would be adjusted to the latter's complete satisfaction. Then he closed the door and hurried to his library, where he wrote to the Y.M.C.A. secretary, stating that he would have no part in financing the proposed camping

trip. Furthermore, he preferred not to be approached again on the subject of boy welfare. He was willing to spend his money in adding to the joys of people who were deserving. But he was firmly of the opinion that boys, as a whole, were not justified in receiving any such consideration.

He signed the letter with a bold stroke of the pen, later enclosing the communication in an addressed envelope. As he was leaving the room, the letter gripped tightly in his hand, he was arrested by a slight cough from the shadows beside the door. Wheeling, he stiffened when he found himself looking into the faces of the unworthy Flannigan twins, for he recognized them, having, on numerous occasions, driven them out of his yard.

"If you aren't busy now, Mr. Dickey, we'd like to tell you why we are here," Rusty began in a faltering voice. He told the story as shortly and directly as possible. "Here is the prize," he concluded, holding out the toy airplane. "It belongs to Henny Lind. We hate him like sixty, but we wouldn't want to keep the airplane and be cheats."

The Colonel's anger had melted away as quickly as it came.

"Aren't all boys cheats more or less?" he questioned, regarding his young visitors with probing eyes.

"I don't think a boy would cheat if people gave him a square deal and believed in him," Rusty spoke in his sturdy way.

A whimsical expression flashed into the old gentleman's eyes.

"Are you a Boy Scout?"

"No, sir," Rusty shook his head.

"Then I'd advise you to join right away, and your brother, too, for the Scouts are going to have a wonderful camping trip. In fact," the impulsive old man added, destroying the letter that he had in his hands, "I've been thinking of taking part in the camping trip myself."

The twins' eyes glowed.

"We always wanted to join," said Rusty. "But we couldn't afford to buy suits. So we kept out of it."

Colonel Dickey never did things by halves.

"I need a couple of good boys to help me take care of my lawn and garden. So come around to-morrow and I'll put you to work."

"The kids all said you were a crab," Rusty blurted out. "But you're all right. And we wouldn't have bothered your strawberry patch if we had known you didn't hate us."

"Will I see you in the morning?" the pleased old gentleman inquired.

"If you don't," grinned Rusty, "it'll be because we're both laid up with paralysis."

CHAPTER IX

MRS. WEEDON'S QUEER WILL

HAVING made friends with the Flannigan children, Miss Minnie Andrews liked to visit the little cottage that Jessie tended so carefully, to talk over housekeeping matters and offer suggestions.

The woman's kindly interest in the younger ones was distinctly proprietary. If the twins got into a scrape (a not uncommon occurrence!) she worried over the misdemeanor quite as much as did Tom and Jessie. The many economies practiced by the little housekeeper were an open book to her. Tom's industry and purpose appealed to the business side of her character. And the love that shone in the little Bennie's eyes when she was near him filled her lonely heart with happy, maternal emotions.

Disliking her young neighbors at first, she had to admit now that they had brought joys into her quiet life that she never had known before. And she wondered, in a whimsical turn of her thoughts, if there were other people in the world who were so busy living their own self-centered

lives that they had no regard for their less fortunate neighbors.

"She's just like a mother to us," Jessie told Tom for the hundredth time.

The older brother grinned.

"I should think she'd tire of running two houses, for every time I come home she's over here helping you."

"I help her, too," Jessie said quickly, wanting the other to know that she gave as well as received.

"Let's invite her to come and live with us," joked Tom. "Then she won't have to chase back and forth."

"Silly! Do you think, with all of her money, that she'd live in a shack like this?"

Tom pretended indignation.

"You've got your nerve," he scowled, "calling our swell home a shack!"

"It is a shack," maintained Jessie.

The young provider looked around at the battered doors and stained wall paper.

"Anyway," he concluded soberly, "it's home to us. And who can say that we'd be any happier if we had oodles of money? Money isn't everything. Did you pay Mr. Lind the rent?"

Jessie nodded.

"I hate to go into his office, for you should see how cross he acts."

"I know," said Tom. "He scowls at me the

same way. But we should worry how much he hates us if he doesn't molest us."

As Jessie had remarked to her brother, Miss Andrews was a woman of means, her father having amassed a fortune during his business lifetime. Practically all of this accumulated wealth had fallen to the daughter, so the maiden lady had no financial worries.

Long before the appearance of the Flannigan children she had found that a few rooms on the ground floor of her big house were sufficient for her needs. Her favorite sitting room looked out on the side where the Flannigans lived. And often, while engaged with her knitting or mending, she would sit here and watch what was going on in the adjoining yard. Rusty and Turk in particular were a never-ending source of entertainment to her.

And now that the twins were working, the interested maiden lady knew all about their plans to buy Scout suits. She was glad that Colonel Dickey was helping them. And she wondered, as she thought of the approaching winter with its accompanying blizzards and snow-bound thoroughfares, if she was doing all for the little "flock" that she should. Like the Colonel, she had more money than she needed for her own use. She could well afford to set them up in a better home. And wouldn't she feel happier in knowing that they were comfortably situated?

A woman of quick action, and determined now to buy the Weedon property and build a new cottage on the site of the old one—a small place that she could rent to her young friends for a few dollars a month—she shortly appeared in the Greenor store where she approached the proprietor, a friend of long standing.

"No," she smiled, reading his thoughts, "I didn't come in to-day to shop. Instead, I want to ask a favor of you."

"Let us go back to my office," suggested the courteous merchant.

"A few weeks ago," the woman began, when the two were alone, "I talked with Mr. Lind about buying the Weedon cottage where the Flannigan children live. He tried to take advantage of me, so I'll have nothing more to do with him, as I told him the last time he called on me. The scoundrel! I led him to believe, too, that I wasn't interested in the place. But I am. And I would like to have you find out at the county seat who holds the deed. Then I can arrange to deal directly with the owners."

"I'll drive over to the courthouse the first thing in the morning," the willing merchant promised.

"I never heard who inherited the property," the woman proceeded thoughtfully. "Mr. Lind, of course, is only the agent. And to that point, Mrs. Weedon's confidence in him always was a puzzle to me, for you know his reputation."

"As I recall," said Mr. Greenor, "she was a very odd woman and accustomed to doing odd things."

"Then you knew her?"

"Only by sight."

"She *was* odd," the informed visitor affirmed. "She made an odd woman of my mother, too. They were both spiritualists. To this day there are rooms in my home that never have been opened since my mother's death, for that was her wish. At first I used to creep upstairs every hour or two and listen at the locked doors. And I was frightened, for the thought of the dead returning to earth *is* unnerving, Mr. Greenor."

The merchant showed surprise.

"And your mother actually believed that she could return from the grave?" he questioned incredulously.

The visitor nodded.

"Such, too, was Mrs. Weedon's belief. So far, though, neither of them has communicated with me."

"I have no faith in spiritualism as it is practiced," declared the practical business man.

"Nor I," the visitor affirmed. "Yet it isn't to be doubted that the followers of spiritualism are in touch with a definite supernatural force. The great trouble is that they combine too much imagination with their findings. Mrs. Weedon and Mother, as I say, were all wrapped up in the

unusual belief. And I have heard queer things myself. One time a trumpet was held to my ear and I distinctly heard voices, among them the voice of Mrs. Weedon's father. At least I was told that it was his spirit voice."

"What did he say?" smiled Mr. Greenor, interested but unconvinced.

"He asked me if I had found the Maharaja's goose."

"And who was holding the trumpet?"

"Mrs. Weedon."

"It may have been her voice that you heard."

"Supposedly, she was in a trance."

"Did you watch her lips?"

"Yes, indeed."

"And you saw no movement?"

"Not the slightest."

The man laughed.

"I never heard before that spirits had a penchant for geese."

"There's quite a story connected with this particular goose," stated the woman, briefly recalling some of her earlier experiences in searching for the unusual mechanism. "But let us not wander further on this limitless subject, for I'm more interested just now in material things."

At the courthouse the following morning Mr. Greenor learned from the registrar of deeds that the Weedon estate had not been settled. The deceased, so the merchant later explained to Miss

Andrews, had left a queer will. By its terms the entire estate was to remain in Mr. Lind's charge for a period of five years, to become his unconditionally at the end of that time if no legal heirs appeared to lay claim to it.

"So it would seem," the merchant concluded regretfully, "that you will have to deal with Mr. Lind after all."

"No," declared the disappointed woman, shaking her head. "If I have to buy the place through him I won't touch it."

"It was a surprise to me," the man added, "to learn that Mrs. Weedon was a Blair before she married."

"Her father," the woman informed, "was old Pegleg Blair, the man who built the log tavern down the river."

The merchant lifted his eyebrows.

"Oh, was that her property, too?"

"So I understand."

"I've visited the place many times. There used to be a ford there."

"I've heard Mrs. Weedon tell about it." Then a light of sympathy came into the speaker's eyes. "Poor old soul! I felt so sorry for her when she was taken to her bed, with no kin to come in and care for her. Her only child, you know, was killed in a railroad accident shortly after he went to the city to live."

It is a coincidence that on this same day the

Manton real-estate man, around whom much of the foregoing conversation revolved, was called to the registrar's office on business.

"What's Greenor's idea in looking up the titles on the Weedon property?" the county official inquired bluntly of the realtor, in the course of their conversation.

The visitor stared.

"Greenor, you say?" he leaned forward, with narrowed eyes.

"You know him—the man who runs the big clothing store in your town."

"Yes," nodded the agent, a grim expression settling about the corners of his big mouth, "I know him."

"He was trying to find out from me who inherited the Weedon estate. I told him to go to you for information."

"I will see him," grunted the agent, "and find out what it is he wants to know."

But contrary to his words the dishonest man had no intention of communicating with the clothing merchant, for the last thing he cared to talk about with anybody was the probable existence of family heirs to an estate that he schemed to keep for himself.

CHAPTER X

IN THE OLD TAVERN

"No WORK to-day,'" cried Rusty, when he awakened the following morning and heard the rain dripping from the cottage eaves.

Turk stretched himself across the tumbled bed and looked through a window at the drenched world.

"Let's hope," said he, "that the clouds dry out before to-morrow."

The twins and their equally lively neighborhood chum, Buddy Allen, had talked for weeks of an overnight hike. It would be great sport, they agreed, to spend a night in the open. And it was this scheduled outing that Turk had in mind as he watched the seasonable downpour.

Miss Andrews had told the boys that they could play in her big barn on rainy days. So they headed for there immediately after breakfast, their chum later joining them with his goat. Like Mary's lamb Buddy's pet was always at his heels. Not many others could handle it, but he had good control over it.

"If I had a harness," he told his chums, "I'd

hitch up Butts to-morrow and make him haul our truck."

"Hot dog!" cried Rusty, with sparkling eyes. "That's what the boys did in the 'Swiss Family Robinson' book that I'm reading."

"It wasn't a goat that they hitched up," corrected Turk, who knew whole pages of the beloved book by heart. "It was a cow."

"Well," maintained Rusty, "a goat is just as good as a cow."

"Better, I think," Buddy put in loyally. "I wouldn't care to own a cow," he added.

Rusty got his eyes on some old leather straps which dated back to the time when the parents of the present owner of the barn had kept a horse.

"Who says we can't have a harness?" he cried. And getting Miss Andrews' permission to cut up the straps to suit themselves they set to work. Nor did Butts object in any way to the awkward contrivance that they put on him. As a matter of fact his earlier owners had taught him to pull a cart. So he felt quite at home, as the saying is, in his new harness.

But boys don't always engage in such quiet occupations. And later Miss Andrews flew to the barn through the rain to find out what was going on there, for she had heard one of the twins yelling for help. And there were other sounds, too, that suggested to her that the whole inside of her barn was being battered down.

She found Rusty with a long hay rope tied under his arms. Turk, balanced on a packing case beside the door, held the other end of the rope, which had been threaded through an overhead pulley. Buddy, also perched on a packing case on the opposite side of the room, was yelling encouragement to the goat, while the leader, wrapped in an old sheet, tried to scoot in safety from one box to the other.

"All right," yipped Rusty, as the barn door opened. "Here I come."

Miss Andrews saw the goat take after him. Then, shuddering, she shut her eyes, expecting to hear a scream when the furious animal struck him. Instead, she heard the sharp creaking of the rope in its rusted pulley. When she opened her eyes, wondering at the ways of small boys, she found the sheeted one dangling in the air out of harm's way, Turk, at just the right moment, having manfully pulled on the rope.

"But suppose the rope should break?" cried the worried woman, when the bright-faced boys gathered around her, all talking at once.

"I've been wishing it would," grinned Turk, looking at his brother.

"The goat butted me once," the latter informed proudly, feeling of his rear portions.

"It was peachy," put in Buddy, in his bubbling way. "Butts knocked him clean over that manger.

We even heard his bones crack. Didn't we, Turk?"

"Sure thing."

"Goodness gracious!" shuddered the timid listener.

"Do you want to try it, Aunt Minnie?" Rusty inquired impishly, offering the newcomer his sheet.

Miss Andrews had no chance to decline the offer, for just then the goat took after her. Strong for his age, Rusty quickly picked her up and stood her on one of the packing cases.

"You're safe up there," he told her, wiping his sweaty face.

"We're teaching him to hunt ghosts," beamed Buddy, as the goat again furiously charged the white-robed figure. "Atta-boy, Butts! You almost got him that time. Jar his back porch loose. That's the stuff."

"It's fun," panted Rusty, scrambling onto the packing case beside the white-faced spectator.

"Please!" she begged in a weak voice. "Take the goat away so that I can get down."

Later she recounted the nerve-wracking affair to Jessie.

"I thought I'd die of fright," she confessed, still trembling, "but the boys really enjoyed it."

"Boys of my brothers' type would be a revelation to you," laughed Jessie, "if you had to live in the same house with them day in and day out. They do things almost beyond human compre-

hension. But, even so," she concluded warmly, "they're lovable."

"Buddy said they were training the goat to hunt ghosts. What did he mean?"

"They're going camping to-morrow, and it is their big hope that they'll find a ghost in the old tavern where they're planning to spend the night."

Miss Andrews knew of only one old tavern in the immediate locality.

"I've been there many times," she told Jessie, with shining eyes. "The place, with its sinister log walls and engulfing thicket, used to be the favored mecca of youthful treasure hunters when I was a girl. Particularly was my cousin, Milo Rollins, now one of Chicago's leading advertising men, interested in the place. But, alas, as is the case in so many youthful treasure hunts, nothing was discovered. Tom Sawyer, it seems, had unusual luck."

"Why is it," said Jessie, "that boys always expect to find treasure around an old house?"

"Recovered wealth wouldn't be treasure," was Miss Andrews' sensible explanation, "if found in a new house. The past is full of romance for all of us. Writers look into the past for their most fascinating adventures. So logically we associate old buildings with adventuresome things, even pirates and murder."

"And is that the history of this particular old house?" Jessie further inquired.

"Oh, no! Pegleg Blair, the tavernkeeper, was well thought of by his neighbors and patrons. He built his tavern at a point where the grain haulers and cattle drivers forded the river, there being no bridges in those early days. The ford was named after him."

The Flannigan cottage was a lively place the following morning, for, of course, the twins wanted to start out at daybreak, so eager were they to sever the ties that bound them to civilization.

"You certainly struck a fine day," Tom told them at the breakfast table. He could hear the droning bees as they foraged in the warm morning sunshine and the caroling birds. Its face washed clean by the preceding day's showers, the world seemed a brighter and happier place. The morning air was laden, too, with the fragrant tang of growing things. Tom drew a deep breath. "I wish I were going with you," he concluded longingly. For with all of his steady, reflective ways he was still a boy at heart.

"Why don't you?" was Rusty's eager inquiry.

"Maybe I can get a few days off later on," Tom spoke hopefully. "But I have too much work piled up around me just now to think of taking a vacation."

Turk looked at his sister.

"How about those beans that you promised to bake for us, Sis?"

"They're all ready," Jessie informed. "And the pie, too."

"Hot dog!"

"And if you'll come over to my house," a voice spoke from the doorway, "you'll find a big chocolate cake waiting for you on the kitchen table."

"Aunt Minnie!" cried Bennie.

"Are *you* going, too?" the early-morning visitor inquired, as she took the little boy in her arms.

"They wouldn't want to bother with me," Bennie spoke with a long face.

"Don't kid yourself," waggled Rusty. "We'll be glad to take you. And we'll let you ride the goat, too."

But Jessie knew that the smaller one was better off at home.

Getting their things together, the twins ran over to Buddy's house. And what fun the trio had loading their cart! As they disappeared bareheaded and barefooted down the sunny street, Jessie gave a hopeful sigh, for she was well informed on the venturesome ways of small boys.

"I'll be glad," she told her neighbor, "when they're home again."

The hilarious campers tried to keep close to the winding river, having been told that the old tavern was situated directly on the river bank, about eight miles from town. But the briary thickets that they encountered soon showed them the wisdom of following the country roads. Here

they found countless puddles. And what gay sport they had splashing through these water holes, Butts trotting contentedly behind them. Later they had to take to the fields, as there were no traveled paths leading directly to the tavern, the road that had served in an older day having long since disappeared.

But eventually they came to their journey's end.

"There it is," cried Rusty, as the old log house suddenly loomed up ahead of them.

"Maybe we better unharness Butts and let him go on alone," suggested Buddy.

"What for?" Rusty wanted to know.

"To chase out the ghosts, of course."

"As though a ghost would show itself in broad daylight!" Rusty spoke scornfully.

"Just the same," waggled Buddy, "I think we better be careful."

"Come on," cried Turk, dashing daringly through the thicket that surrounded the old house.

The boys saw now that the tavern was a two-story building, the log walls of which were plastered on the inside. And so well had the early mason performed his work that the thick plaster in many places still clung to the hand-made lath. Built of boards a foot wide, the floor had completely rotted away in places. And fearful of a fall into the lower recesses the young explorers

picked their steps with sensible caution, Buddy bringing up the rear.

"And do you call that a cellar?" said Turk, squinting into the deep, windowless hole.

"Sure thing," nodded Rusty.

"It looks more like a dungeon to me."

"Let's go down," suggested Rusty.

But when he stepped on the stairs the supporting timbers completely collapsed.

"Grab me!" he screeched, throwing out his hands. And had the others not taken hold of him he would have suffered a bad fall.

Crossing a hall, the floor of which was littered with old bones that other gangs of boys had brought here, the explorers found themselves in a large room facing the river. A yawning fireplace with its blackened mantel stared at them hungrily from one wall, while opposite was a wide staircase.

"Let's go up," suggested Rusty.

"I'll stay here with Butts," said Buddy, who was fearful that his pet would fall through the rotten floor.

"Tie him to that ring in the wall," said Rusty, "and come on."

The upper rooms with their bare cracked walls and sagging doors were not nearly as interesting to the boys as the big fireplace and dungeon-like cellar. So they started for the stairs, stopping

abruptly when Rusty pointed to a closed trapdoor in the hall ceiling.

"I wonder what's up there?" he sought his companions' opinion.

"The attic, of course," said Turk.

"Queer," mused the leader, when, after climbing a plank, he found that the trapdoor was locked on the inside. Then he ran outdoors, satisfying himself, after brief inspection of the building's exterior, that whoever had locked the attic door had left through a dormer window.

"I bet it was a ghost," said Buddy.

The river was too dirty after the recent showers to permit of swimming. So the campers put in the afternoon roaming here and there in the adjacent forest. How the berry bushes suffered! And how Jessie would have scolded could she have seen their stained faces! But they were free now—as free as the birds who were their companions. They had broken civilization's bonds. Kings they were in their own kingdom, privileged to destroy or build up as they saw fit.

When evening came they built a fire in the big fireplace, having gathered a huge armful of wood, roasting their "weenies" in the ruddy flame. And to think, they talked back and forth, that there were people in the world who preferred to eat at a table! It was almost unbelievable, for this, of course, was the only real way to live.

Filled up on "weenies," baked beans and

berries, they gathered more wood, wanting to keep the fire alive until it was time for them to "hit the hay," as they expressed it, the "hay" in this case consisting of a pile of leaves and grass that had been gathered for the occasion, the campers wanting to make their bed as soft as possible. Returning from the adjacent spring, an hour or so after the sun had set, Turk told the others about a pair of green eyes that he had seen in the shadowy bushes—Buddy, of course, insisting straightway that the eyes belonged to a ghost.

"Oh, for the love of mud!" growled Rusty. "You've got ghosts on the brain."

"But you said we'd find a ghost here," the smaller one maintained.

"And you believed me!" the words were accompanied by a jeering laugh.

"Were you fooling?" came the eager inquiry.

"Sure thing."

"I wouldn't want to meet a ghost myself," was Buddy's candid admission. "But it would be fun to see Butts chase one."

"There's no such thing as a real ghost," declared Rusty, with superior wisdom.

"Just the same," waggled Buddy, "I'm going to tie Butts at the foot of the stairs when I go to bed."

"It's bedtime now," yawned Turk.

"All right," Rusty yawned in pattern. "Let's turn in."

CHAPTER XI

THE GHOST ON THE STAIRS

THE goat having been tied at the foot of the stairs, the young campers crawled into their bed. And what a wonderful bed it was! They spoke of it repeatedly. As Rusty said, feathers were comfortable, especially on a cold winter's night. But there was an outdoor fragrance to this bed that had feathers beat a million miles.

"I wish we could stay here forever," the leader thus expressed his contentment.

"Me, too," said Turk.

"It would be fun," agreed Buddy, "to make furniture out of trees. We could make clay dishes, too, like Robinson Crusoe."

"They tell me," informed Turk, looking up at the beamed ceiling, made visible by the flickering fire and the rising moon, "that old Lind owns this place, too. He inherited it from Mrs. Weedon."

"But are you sure that it's really his?" corrected Rusty. "I heard that he just has the handling of it."

"Who does own it?"

"Mrs. Weedon's relatives, I suppose."

"I wish I owned it," Turk spoke longingly.

"What would you do with it?" inquired Buddy.

"I'd come here and live, of course."

"Jessie and Tom might have something to say about that," laughed Rusty.

"Do you know what I'd do with it if I owned it?" put in Buddy.

"What?" the twins spoke together.

"I'd give it to the Boy Scouts."

That fired Turk's imagination.

"Hot dog!" he cried. "It sure would make a swell Boy Scout camp, all right."

"If—" said Rusty in his practical way.

"If what?"

"If someone would contribute the necessary jack to fix it up. For the roof is falling in and half of the floors have rotted away."

Turk had big ideas.

"Oh," he gestured grandly, "I'd see that everything was fixed up, for I'm going to be rich when I'm a man."

Unable to get to sleep, like his brother and chum, who lay in the moonlight with their arms wrapped around each other, Rusty got up shortly after eleven o'clock and replenished the fire. He wasn't afraid, yet a peculiar uneasiness had taken possession of him.

Could it be true, he asked himself, searching his mind for the cause of his unusual wakefulness, that the old tavern was indeed tenanted by

invisible spooks, chief among them the spook of old Pegleg Blair himself? And was it the presence of these spirits that now filled him with eerie wakefulness, notwithstanding his earlier expressed disbelief in ghosts? Was his mind, or some mysterious part of it, conscious of dangers that his eyes couldn't see?

Buddy stirred in his sleep.

"Butts!" spoke the little boy. "Good old Butts!"

And having heard its name called, the faithful goat raised its whiskered head; then dropped it again after having satisfied itself apparently that all was well.

Reassured, Rusty went back to bed.

"I'd like to see the ghost," he chuckled, "that could pass that goat."

Forests are deceiving. This one, as explored by the hilarious young campers in the heat of the glorious midsummer day, had seemed tenanted only by merry birds and saucy squirrels. But nightfall had brought a change. Hidden burrows gave up hairy, skulking, hungry forms. Others, of varying shapes and sizes, came from rocky crevices. All were attracted to the old tavern, around which they now prowled with cautious, muffled, uneasy steps. For there were new smells here. Human smells. Not that the attracted creatures had any intention of molesting the in-

truders. But even animals in their wild state are innately curious.

Bats, too, forsaking the dank, dark cellar, flew by the hundreds around and around the old log building. Rusty could see them in the moonlight. Once a big owl passed the open window, later coming to rest, with a sharp scraping of its talons, on the weathered window sill. A part of nature themselves, boys as a rule have no fear of nature's creatures. And the wakeful one excitedly shook his sleeping companions, wanting them to see the unusual feathered visitor. But the owl, at the boy's first movements, took fright and flew away.

"You're too late," Rusty told his brother, when the latter sat up and rubbed his sleepy eyes.

"Too late for what?" yawned Turk.

"There was a big owl on the window sill. And did his eyes ever glitter! Oh, boy! Just like balls of fire. But he's gone now."

"Only an owl!" grunted Turk, thinking of his broken rest.

"But he was a big fellow."

"Did he wake you up?"

"No; I haven't been asleep yet."

"What time is it?"

Rusty consulted his watch.

"Almost midnight."

"But why don't you go to sleep?"

"I can't."

"Huh!"

"Hear the frogs! They've yapped continuously ever since the sun went down."

"The river's full of them."

"But what's their idea in holding an all-night broadcast? Why don't they go to bed?"

"As though frogs have beds!"

"Why not?" laughed Rusty. "The river has a bed."

Turk got up and went to a window.

"Some moon," said he, looking at the friendly round face.

"I always thought that houses looked pretty in the moonlight," said Rusty. "But feast your eyes on those poplars. Just like fairyland."

"Yah," laughed Turk, "and see those eyes."

"Where?" came Rusty's quick inquiry.

"Over there in that blackberry thicket," the speaker pointed.

"Some kind of a wildcat, I bet; or a panther."

"If only we had a gun, huh?"

"Why do you always want to shoot things?"

"And why not?"

"Suppose everybody did that," lectured Rusty. "There wouldn't be anything left to shoot at in a couple of years. Anyway, Boy Scouts aren't supposed to kill wild animals. You know that."

Buddy sat up.

"Wha-at's the matter?" he rubbed his eyes.

"Come and see the ghost," joked Turk. "It's got green eyes."

Then the boys caught their breath, and stiffened, the twins clutching each other's hands, when a peculiar penetrating sound came from above.

"What is it?" gasped Buddy, so frightened that he could hardly speak.

Rusty tiptoed to the foot of the stairs where he stood for several moments with sharpened ears.

"It was the wind, I guess," he finally offered his opinion.

"But there is no wind," declared Turk.

"If ghosts open doors," said Buddy, with chattering teeth, "that's what it was."

"It *did* sound like a creaking door," admitted the uneasy leader. "But you can't make me believe that there's a ghost up there, for I don't believe in ghosts."

Thump!

"For the love of Pete!" gasped the leader, now shaken in his belief. "There *is* something up there."

Here a deep, guttural groan came down the stairs. It made the boys think of eerie cemetery vaults and glittering tombstone eyes. Graves seemed to be yawning at their feet. Then they heard a clanking chain.

"It's old Pegleg himself," screamed Buddy. "There he is on the stairs. And he's got a dagger! See? He's going to murder us."

Old Pegleg's ghost! Even Rusty was chilled to the soles of his feet. And unable to run away, and thus save themselves from the terrible peril that was closing in on them, the horrified campers watched the awful apparition float down the stairs, chains that they couldn't see clanking at the invisible feet. Its extended arms, in one of which a dagger was clutched with undoubted deadly intent, were more like the wings of a huge white bat. It had no perceptible neck. But in what undoubtedly was its head the terror-stricken trio could detect black-rimmed eyes. A more hideous and fearsome thing could hardly be imagined.

And what of the four-legged bodyguard? Had the faithful animal that instinctive fear of the descending apparition that is often credited to creatures of the lower order? It would seem so, for it backed away with lowered head. And noticing, Buddy, as he clutched at his chums for support, was more frightened than ever. Then a sharp clatter of hoofs sounded through the room as the animal charged.

A fight between a goat and a ghost! Something, Rusty told himself, as interest in the impending battle partly overcame his fears, that the world never had heard of. And then as the goat struck squarely in what might be called the

seat of the apparition's pants, the leader angrily clenched his hands—an instinctive fighting attitude. For he saw now that what had appeared to be a ghost was no ghost at all, but a small boy dressed up in a sheet, the eye holes of which had been rimmed with charcoal.

"Help! Help!" screamed the trickster, as the goat further attacked him from behind.

Rusty took the goat by its collar.

"I guess that'll teach you," he glared at the "ghost," now struggling to disentangle himself from the folds of his sheet, "not to play tricks on people. For two cents I'd let Butts take another crack at you."

"Oh, no!" screamed the boy, dropping his wooden dagger. "Please don't."

When freed of his sheet he was seen to be a black-eyed, black-haired lad of fourteen. Nor did there appear to be anything tough or undesirable about him, notwithstanding the fact that he was very poorly dressed.

"Who are you?" demanded Rusty, having satisfied himself that the boy was a stranger in the neighborhood. "And what are you doing here?"

"Well," fire showed in the speaker's black eyes, as he glanced at the goat, now busy tearing the sheet to shreds, "I've got a better right to the place. Because I got here first."

Rusty was curious.

"What's your name?" he persisted.

"That's my business."

"Sassy, huh?"

"Well, if you don't like it you know what you can do. For nobody's keeping you here."

"What was your idea in scaring us?"

"Ask me," came the defiant retort.

Rusty's eyes narrowed.

"I'd ought to give you a poke in the jaw," he growled.

"Three against one," sneered the boy.

"Any one of us could handle you."

"Do you want to try it yourself?" came the fearless invitation.

Boys admire courage in others.

"We could put you out of here," said Rusty, "for we're the strongest. But I suppose you've got just as much right to the place as we have. So go back to your attic if you want to. We'll leave you alone if you leave us alone."

The strange boy didn't deny that he had been hiding in the attic that afternoon, which explained how the trapdoor came to be locked on the inside. But as he paused at the foot of the stairs a wistful look came into his expressive eyes.

"Are you Manton boys?" he inquired.

"Sure thing," acknowledged Rusty, whose creed it was to make friends with any respectable boy who wanted to make friends with him.

And still the stranger hesitated at the foot of the stairs.

"Is it hard to get into your gang?" came the further inquiry.

Rusty saw what was going on in the other's mind.

"Not if you're on the square."

The boy straightened.

"No one ever said I wasn't on the square."

"If you'd rather stay here with us," invited Rusty, "you're welcome. We'll help you, too, if you're in trouble. But I think you ought to tell us who you are."

"My name is George Weedon," the boy spoke simply. "I came from Wisconsin. And I'm an orphan."

"We're orphans, too," put in Turk, referring to himself and his twin brother.

"Our names," Rusty followed up, "are Ralph and Royal Flannigan, though usually we're called Turk and Rusty on account of our hair and freckles. There are five of us in our family. People call us the Flannigan flock. And this little fellow is Buddy Allen, a neighbor kid."

"I own the goat," Buddy informed proudly.

The worsted "ghost" felt of his rear portions.

"Ouch!" he laughed uneasily.

"We taught him to fight ghosts," explained Buddy.

"So much the worse for me."

"What did you say your name is?" Rusty leaned forward.

"George Weedon. I'm a great-grandson of the old man who built this tavern."

"What?" cried Rusty, staring. "Not a grandson of old Mrs. Weedon who died in our house!"

"I don't know what you mean by 'our house,'" nodded the orphan boy. "But my grandmother died in Manton, if that answers your question."

Then, the fire having been revived, George Weedon sat among his new friends and told his pitiful story.

"My pa died many years ago. His name was the same as mine. My ma had quarreled with my Grandma Weedon, so we never went there. Nor did my grandmother ever write to us or help us. My ma had a hard time of it. The work she did to earn a living killed her. It wasn't till after she was gone that word reached me that I had lost my grandmother, too, though at that time her loss didn't mean anything to me, for her indifference to us had turned me against her. I was told that there was a mortgage on everything she owned, which left me as poor as ever. Shortly after my ma's funeral—they buried her in a cheap black casket—I was taken away to the county poorhouse."

Rusty's hand closed firmly over the speaker's.

"We know what it is to be poor," he spoke

sympathetically. "I dare say if it hadn't been for our big brother that we, too, would have wound up in the poorhouse. But Tom and my older sister kept us together. And now we all work together to earn a living."

"I'd like to meet your brother Tom," George returned the warm handclasp.

"Well, why not?"

"You can come and live with us," Turk spoke eagerly, "if you'll sleep three in a bed."

"Oh, boy!" laughed Rusty. "That *will* be fun."

"But what will your sister say?"

"Our home is always open," Rusty spoke simply, "to anybody who's in trouble."

Buddy's mind was on the interrupted story.

"What happened after they took you to the poorhouse?" he inquired.

"I was there for several years," the story was resumed. "It was a good place, in a way. I had plenty to eat and to wear. Nothing fancy—you can see that by my clothes. But I got along. A poorhouse, though, isn't a home. It's just a building. And the majority of the people living there are old men and old women. That's what got me—never having any boys of my own age to play with. Still, I don't know as I hated that half as bad as the rubbernecks."

"Rubbernecks?" Rusty repeated questioningly.

"That's what we called the visitors," George

explained. "And that's what they were—rubber-necks and nothing else but. The home was open to visitors on Wednesday and Sunday afternoons. And because we had crazy people there, who did queer things—one old fellow who thought he was a king wore a paper crown—townspeople living near by, and in better circumstances, thought it was fun to stop and see the sights. I was a guide. I used to get tips. Which was all right. But I hated being kissed. And that's what half of the women wanted to do to me. They called me a poor little dear, too, and said how unfortunate I was not to have a father and mother. Instead of sympathy, what I wanted was a chance to get out in the world and earn my own living. But no one ever offered me a home. The women were willing enough to kiss me; and the men gave me tips for showing them around, as I say. But no one wanted to bother with me. I heard one woman say: 'He looks like a good boy. But you know how these foundlings usually turn out. It's born in 'em.' "

"What's a foundling?" Turk put in.

"Search me," shrugged George. "But I guess it's a kid who lives in an orphans' home. Anyway, that's what they called me."

"Did they let you keep the tips that you got?" inquired Rusty, in his practical way.

"Not always. And to save up what little I had when I ran away I probably cheated. But I should

worry. I made up my mind a year ago that I was going to clear out, and I prepared for it. Three weeks ago I beat it, taking all my clothing and the few papers that my ma had left behind, including her wedding certificate. I took along a sheet, too, thinking that I could make it into a tent, for it was my intention to camp along the road. But where should I go? Remembering my dad—he was a good fellow, kids, and loved me—I felt a peculiar longing to come here. And why not? It would be fun to see the old log tavern that my great-grandfather had built—for I had heard about it from my parents. So I headed south. It took me a week to get here. For the most part I traveled nights and slept days, hiding in hollows and places like that. Nor did I, when I finally hit Manton, go to see Mr. Lind, for I was afraid that if I told him who I was he would send me back to the poorhouse. So I kept my identity to myself. Buying what stuff I needed in Manton I came here and for more than a week I've been living in the attic, roaming through the woods days and filling up on berries. I fished, too. It was fun. The first real freedom, as you might say, that I've ever known. Yet I was lonesome. I beat it for the attic when you kids showed up. And then I tried to get rid of you by playing ghost. But that goat of yours was too much for me. Boy, can *he* ever butt!"

Rusty had been waiting for a pause in the story.

"You spoke of Mr. Lind. Do you know him?"

"It was from him that I got the letter telling about my grandmother's death."

"The dirty crook!" cried Rusty, with flashing eyes.

"What do you mean?" George inquired quickly.

"He made you think that your grandmother was a poor woman. But she wasn't. She was rich."

George was staring now.

"You're joking," he finally found his voice.

"Like so much mud."

"But Mr. Lind told me——"

"Sure thing," interrupted Rusty. "*He* would tell you that your grandmother was poor, with a mortgage on everything she owned. He's that kind of a man. A two-legged skunk. That's what *he* is. He intends to cheat you. But my brother Tom will help you. And if we need other help we'll call on Mr. Greenor. He'll see that you get what's coming to you."

George looked dizzy.

"And to think that this could happen to *me!*" he spoke emotionally, so used to hardships that he had come to expect nothing else. "It seems almost unbelievable."

"Your grandmother," Rusty went on, "was a very queer woman. She believed in spirits. I guess that she was a miser, too, for the neighbors

tell the story that she buried money in her cellar floor before she died."

"And Lind dug it up," contributed Buddy.

"It's your money," put in Turk. "You can make him give it back to you."

"People suspect that Lind found the hidden money," Rusty qualified. "After your grandmother's death he wouldn't let anyone enter the house but himself. The neighbors say he searched the place from top to bottom. The cellar floor is full of holes. But he never admitted that he found anything. And, as I tell my brother Tom, it isn't improbable that the money is still there."

CHAPTER XII

CAMPING FUN

RUSTY was up at daybreak the following morning. Nor would he let his companions sleep.

"All out!" he cried, messing them around in the rough way so common with boys.

"Quit it," kicked Buddy. "I want to get my beauty nap."

"You need it," laughed the merry leader.

"Pull him out," cried Turk, now wide awake, "for it's his turn to cook breakfast."

"I'll help," offered George, wanting to do his part, and glad of the opportunity.

"What are we going to have?" questioned Rusty.

"Pancakes," informed Turk.

"How about some eggs and bacon?"

"Um-yum-yum!"

"Hear that, slow motion?" Turk thumped the smaller one in his stomach.

Buddy saw that it was useless to try to sleep. Anyway, having been thoroughly awakened, he was as willing as the others to get up and start the day's fun.

"We ought to have a dip before we dress," suggested Rusty.

"Not in the river," objected Turk. "It's too dirty."

George started for the door.

"Come on," he cried. "I want to show you something."

The "something" was a hidden pool, which he called his private bathtub.

"It's spring water," he laughed, getting ready for his usual morning plunge. "So prepare yourself for a chill."

Buddy wet one of his feet.

"Sufferin' cats!" he squawked, drawing back. "It's like ice water."

"Dive," yelled Turk, giving the smaller one a shove.

"How about yourself," laughed Rusty.

And in went Turk, up to his neck.

"You're next," George gave the leader a shove.

"I'm paralyzed," squawked Buddy, making for shore.

"Don't t-t-tell me you're cold," shivered Rusty.

"Oh, n-n-no," Buddy shivered in turn. "I'm b-b-burning up. Somebody hand me a fan."

"Here I come," yelled George. And after a run of ten or twelve feet he jumped gracefully from the grassy bank, landing squarely in the center of the crystal pool.

"Let's get out and b-b-build a fire," chattered Turk.

Half dressed, he had to return to the pool and wash himself when one of his chums daubed him on the back with a handful of soft clay. And thus the hilarious campers kept up the fun. Small wonder indeed that boys love to get together in places like this. Nor are the outdoor adventures that boys so cheerfully share with one another ever forgotten.

There was more fun during the breakfast preparations, for in stirring the pancake batter Buddy got it in his face and all over his khaki shirt.

"Why don't you put on a diving suit?" suggested Turk, dropping an armful of fuel beside the roaring fire.

"The blame stuff splatters," blinked the hard-working cook.

"If you keep on," laughed Turk, "there won't be any batter left in the pan."

"Anyway," put in Rusty, "he's getting a lot of vigorous exercise."

"Look how his muscles are developing!"

"Wonderful."

"Oh-h-h! He got another spoonful in the eye. Now isn't that just *too* bad."

"Bring a shovel, George."

"How thick do you make it?" Buddy studied the lumpy batter.

"That all depends. If you're going to use it

for mortar I would suggest that you add a little more sand. But if you expect us to eat it——"

"Aren't we going to have any coffee?" Rusty piped up.

"Listen to him!" snorted Buddy, wiping his face. "He thinks this is a first-class hotel."

"I've got a coffeepot," George offered.

"Let's have some toast, too," was Rusty's added suggestion.

"You won't get anything," bawled the exasperated pancake baker, "if you don't shut up."

"Of all the punk cooks," criticized Turk. "Look! He never even greased the pan."

Buddy experienced difficulty in separating his first dingy-looking pancake from the bottom of the smoking pan.

"It sticks," he complained to nobody in particular.

"Does it?" Turk leaned forward innocently.

"Will you shut up?" screamed Buddy, as the sweat streamed down his face.

"But when do we eat?"

"I can't cook with you looking at me."

"I'll turn my back."

Then there was a squawk as the quick-minded cook, having finally loosened the rebellious pancake (his maiden effort!), dumped the contents of the pan down his tormentor's neck.

"Holy cow!" squawked Turk, clutching his backbone.

"I skidded," grinned Buddy.

"My fist will skid and land on the end of your beak if you pull another stunt like that."

Rusty then lent a practical hand to the breakfast preparations.

"You fry the eggs," he told Buddy, "and I'll bake the pancakes."

Later the hilarious quartet sat down to what was unanimously declared the most wonderful meal of their lives, one of the cracked doors of the old kitchen cupboard having been converted into a practical table.

"When are we going home?" inquired Buddy, who, to add to the fun, had made himself a chef's cap of an old newspaper.

"Next January," joked Turk, helping himself to his fourteenth pancake.

"And you're the guy who made fun of them," Buddy grimly eyed the disappearing pancake.

"They taste better than they look," smacked the hungry camper.

"Save some for the goat," reminded George, when the chef began scraping the bottom of the batter dish.

"Why not bake your shirt?" was Turk's amiable suggestion. "It's half batter anyway."

"Sure thing," put in Rusty. "Butts will enjoy it."

"I'm glad I don't have to cook dinner," Buddy sighed at the post of duty.

"Just look at him!" Turk spoke with mock sympathy. "The poor little dear is completely tuckered out."

"Don't forget," Buddy spoke spitefully, "that it's your turn to wash the dishes."

"*My* turn?"

"Nothing else but."

"How about another hunk of fried hen fruit?" Rusty held up his plate.

"Give him the shells," joked George.

"Take them," Buddy promptly dumped the pan of eggshells into the middle of the table.

"Now, was that nice?" grinned Rusty.

"Pancakes! Pancakes! Pancakes!" squawked Turk. "My kingdom for a pancake."

"Sufferin' sauerkraut!" the cook squawked in turn. "What kind of a human reservoir are you anyway?"

"A boy can't grow," grinned Turk, "unless he eats."

"You eat too much."

"Less gab, cheffy, and more pancakes."

"Answer my question and I'll give you one."

"And what's the question?"

"I asked you when we're going home?"

"At four-thirty, sweetheart."

"Having had such a hearty breakfast," Rusty let out his belt, "it'll hardly be necessary to cook dinner. Eh, Turk?"

"Berries and cookies will satisfy me."

"You big cheats!" shrieked Buddy. "You make me cook a lot of stuff, and when it comes your turn you pick berries."

"What do you want—roast turkey and cranberry sauce?"

"How about some fried fish?"

"All right," laughed Rusty. "You and George catch the fish and Turk will fry them."

"Anything but eels," qualified the appointed fish fryer, "for they look too much like snakes to tempt me."

So the boys put in a part of the morning fishing. Later they explored the tavern's lower recesses, learning that the cellar was floored with flat stones, so cleverly put together that it was difficult to detect the joints.

"Anyway," laughed Rusty, looking around the jail-like room, "we know that old Lind didn't do any digging here."

Following a noonday meal of fried perch and baked potatoes, with berries and buttered bread for dessert, the campers enjoyed a farewell trip through the forest, after which they reluctantly packed up their stuff and started on the trip back to town.

Rusty looked back at the old tavern.

"It's yours," he told George, whose stuff had been packed in the cart. "Had you thought of that?"

"And you really think that I can make Mr.

Lind give it up?" the orphan spoke longingly.

"Sure thing. And the house that we live in, too. It's all yours, for you are a blood relation, and he's just an agent."

There was a mist in George's eyes.

"You don't know how good it seems to have friends," he spoke emotionally.

"I suppose," added Rusty, waggling his tousled head, "that old Lind will put up a fight. But he won't last long when we sick Mr. Greenor on him."

"And to think," said George, "that yesterday morning I hadn't a friend in the world. It seems like a fairy tale."

"Mr. Greenor is a smart man," continued Rusty, "and he's fair. You'll like him, and you'll like my brother Tom, too."

"It's a cinch," George spoke warmly, "that I like you."

"Ditto," was Rusty's equally warm response.

"You and your brother are peachy, and that little kid, too."

"We try to be on the square."

Turk dropped behind.

"Are you a Boy Scout?" he inquired of his new friend.

"No," George shook his head. "But I'd like to be."

"That old tavern of yours would make a swell Boy Scout camp," Turk hinted.

"The Scouts can use it whenever they wish," came the prompt invitation.

"Hot dog! I'll tell our Scoutmaster. And maybe we can camp there later on in the month."

That evening the exciting story was passed up and down Beeker Street that a grandson of the late Mrs. Weedon had unexpectedly appeared on the scene to lay just claim to his estate. According to the circulated report, the young heir was staying with the Flannigans, in what had been his odd grandmother's old home.

"The ghost at Pegleg Ford!" such was the title of an article that later appeared in the local newspaper. A clever reporter pictured the arrival of the campers on the woodland scene; their fright when the "ghost" came down the stairs; and the apparition's exposure, in which, as has been described, the goat took a leading part. George's whole story was told in the newspaper. And, as can be imagined, he became thereafter the target of much curious attention. Particularly did the neighborhood boys crowd around him, eager to get the story in his own words. All who met him liked him, for he was a fine lad and deserving of his good fortune.

Always glad to help another, and needing advice, Tom had taken the young heir to Mr. Greenor, who, having heard the orphan's story, had cheerfully offered to take the matter in hand. While the discreet merchant didn't admit it to

his young friends, it is safe to say that he welcomed the chance to expose his rascally business associate, for honest men detest dishonesty in others.

Olaf Lind had made many local enemies, for he seldom handled a deal without cheating. So the townspeople were not slow to declare that he had schemed to rob the Weedon boy of his birthright. This undoubtedly was the case, for the story of the mortgage was a lie, told to keep the young heir away from Manton until the expiration of the five-year period as specified in the grandmother's will.

When exposed, Lind, after a great deal of blustering, agreed to settle the matter outside of court. And when his records had been audited, and the extent of the Weedon estate thus determined (the realtor maintained to the last that he had found no hidden wealth in his client's house), a bonded guardian was appointed for George, it being the guardian's duty to take charge of the estate until the grandson was legally qualified to handle his own affairs.

When consulted regarding his possible choice of a guardian, George, at Tom's sensible suggestion, promptly named Mr. Greenor. However, the young heir refused to change homes. "I want to live with you," he told the Flannigan children. So the new guardian made arrangements with Tom and Jessie to board his young charge.

Which added materially to the little housekeeper's work. But she didn't mind that. She was only too glad, kindly girl that she was, to do what she could to make George happy. Besides, his board money was a big help.

Later in the month Miss Andrews purchased the Weedon cottage, following its appraisal by a committee of disinterested business men. Thus it became known throughout town that the wealthy woman was planning to erect a new home for her favored friends.

"But if you tear down the old cottage," puzzled Tom, when the kindly neighbor revealed her plans, "what is going to become of us while you are building the new cottage on the old foundation?"

The maiden lady was as happy as a young girl.

"You're coming to live with me," she spoke with sparkling eyes.

Tom laughed.

"You'd better think twice before taking these brothers of mine into your home, for they're a noisy gang."

Rusty gave a whoop.

"Let's live in a tent," he suggested. "We can put it up in the back yard and have oodles of fun."

"No," Miss Andrews shook her head, determined to have her own way. "You're coming to live with me. You can have the whole west wing

to yourselves. So what little noise you make won't disturb me in the least. In fact, I rather look forward to your coming."

Tom's eyes were warm.

"Aunt Minnie," he spoke feelingly, "I hope I'll have the chance some day to repay you for all the fine things you're doing for us."

"If you and your brothers grow up into useful men," said the sensible woman, "that is all the pay I expect."

Holding the kindly neighbor's thin white hand, Jessie pressed it to her warm cheek.

"It isn't to be wondered at that we all love you, Aunt Minnie, for you're always thinking of us and doing something to help us. The cherries and strawberries that I canned—with your help! —all came from your place. And yesterday you stayed at home purposely to show me how to bake currant bread."

"How about yourself?" the woman inquired, with sparkling eyes. "Who took care of me last month when I had the lumbago? And who helped me piece that red-and-white quilt?"

"But all the time I'm helping you I'm learning," Jessie confessed, feeling that she deserved no praise.

"And how about your brothers?" the happy woman went on. "I suppose Royal and Ralph never cleaned my porches with the hose or mowed my big lawn."

"It was fun for them to play with the hose. They told me so. Look how they squirted each other and soaked your front hall."

Emotional tears came into the woman's eyes.

"You can't imagine how much real joy you've brought into my life," she told her young friends, as they gathered around her. "Before you came I was selfish. I can see it now. I kept other people out of my life, particularly children, because I foolishly let a lot of little things annoy me. Now I feel as though I'm making some real use of my life. I have new responsibilities. I would dread going back to the old ways."

So it was all arranged that the Flannigans were to move into the west wing of the rambling white house. And as Jessie later looked at the closed east wing she wondered, with a touch of uneasiness, how it would seem to live in a house in which certain rooms had been set apart for the spirit of its former owner!

CHAPTER XIII

WHAT THE WORKMEN FOUND

THE allotted rooms in the west wing of the rambling white house having been cleared of their furniture, to accommodate the newcomers and their meager belongings, Tom and his little "flock" then moved in.

And what a gay time the twins had lugging chairs and kitchen utensils from one house to the other! The neighbors were highly entertained, for boys are full of nonsense, these boys in particular.

Jessie, though, quickly put a halt to their monkeyshines when she caught Turk parading up and down the street in a green-silk petticoat.

"I don't care if it is an old thing that you found in the wood shed," she lectured sharply. "You're acting silly, and I want you to stop it."

Buddy then hurried into sight with his goat and cart.

"I got here just as soon as I could," he beamed.

The weary girl gave a despairing sigh, for she knew very well that the goat's appearance on the scene would in no way improve matters. Then

she screamed with alarm as Rusty came on the run with the parlor lamp in his arms.

"No," she cried, rescuing her treasured possession. "You're not going to put it in that cart."

"Get the clock," next boomed Turk.

"Oh, dear!" wailed Jessie, on the verge of tears. "I don't know why God ever made small boys."

Tom could be stern when the occasion required it.

"We're not doing this for your amusement," he spoke sharply to his grinning brothers. "It's a duty, and if you don't want to help us, go over to Colonel Dickey's and finish mowing his lawn."

Turk put an arm around Jessie's neck.

"Do you love me, Sis?" he inquired contritely.

"You know I do," the warm-hearted girl drew him closer to her. "And what's more I always shall. But I do get terribly provoked at you."

"Take him over your knees and spank him," Tom counseled grimly.

But when Jessie tried this she hurt her hand.

"What in the world have you got in the seat of your pants?" she cried.

"A geography," grinned the impish younger brother.

"Oh, dear! If you aren't the worst boy I ever heard tell of."

"He wanted you to paddle him all the time,"

laughed Rusty. "That's why he hugged you."

Jessie stiffened, for she had learned a lot about the ways of small boys.

"And what have you got in the seat of *your* pants?" she demanded.

Rusty showed her.

"My best pie tin! Tom, take him out in the shed and shake him. The very idea!"

Miss Andrews then came into sight.

"I've been arranging your things as fast as the boys brought them over," she told the little housekeeper. "But I think we ought to hurry, for the house wreckers have agreed to start work at one o'clock."

"Oh, boy!" cried Rusty. "I can see where I hang out this afternoon. Grab that chair, Turk. Ready? All right, let's go."

"They're the worst pests," Jessie complained wearily to her neighbor, as the twins disappeared at a lively gait around a corner of the big white house.

"They're normal boys," declared the understanding woman, "and I wouldn't change them if I could. Nor would you," she concluded wisely.

Thereafter the twins and their new chum hardly left the neighborhood, so interested were they in the house-wrecking job. Nor were the experienced workmen long in denuding the aged stucture of its rotten shingles and weathered siding. The exposed framework reminded the boys

of a misshapen skeleton. At times the falling timbers filled them with regret, for it was destructive work. Yet their common sense told them that it had to be done to make way for the proposed new building.

"The new house is all right," Rusty told his brother, as they watched one of the sweating workmen hack away at the kitchen walls. "But I'll always remember the fun we had in the old house."

"Me, too," Turk spoke feelingly.

George suddenly clutched the leader's arm.

"Look!" he cried, pointing to the running workmen. "They're gathering around that fellow in the kitchen."

Rusty had sharp eyes.

"They've found something," he declared. "Come on, George. I bet it's your grandmother's hidden fortune."

The foreman met them at the kitchen door.

"You're a lucky dog," he told George, handing the excited grandson a sack of money.

"Where did you find it?" cried Rusty.

"Tucked away in the kitchen wall."

The boys counted thirty twenty-dollar gold pieces. Nor was that all. Later in the day a second filled sack came to light; then a third.

The recovery of the hidden money caused a stir throughout the neighborhood. Dozens of people flocked to the scene, and those that had

A SACK FILLED WITH GOLD PIECES CAME TO LIGHT.

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known the former house owner during her lifetime recounted her many odd characteristics.

"It's lucky for you," Rusty told George, thinking of the realtor's early attempts to find the hidden fortune, "that your grandmother hid her money in the kitchen walls instead of in the cellar."

"What did she do?" inquired the young heir, still dazed by his unexpected good fortune. "Dig a hole in the plaster and then fill it up?"

"Sure thing."

"Boy, she *was* queer—there's no doubt about that."

"You might have lost everything," said Rusty, "if the building had caught fire."

"Gold doesn't burn."

"It melts. And once it had gotten into the ground it probably never would have been recovered."

"We thought old Lind was lying when he told Mr. Greenor that he had found no money in the house," said Turk. "But I guess he was telling the truth all right."

Rusty tripped on a loose board in the kitchen floor.

"Which reminds me," he spoke with mounting excitement, "that a number of the boards were loose when we moved in."

"More of Lind's work, I suppose," said Turk.

"George's grandmother could have done it."

"And you think there's more gold hidden under the kitchen floor?" Turk, too, became excited.

"Why not?" Rusty gave free rein to his imagination.

That evening, after the departure of the workmen, the three treasure hunters removed from under the kitchen floor a wooden chest of considerable size. They trembled with excitement as they broke the box open, confident, of course, that it contained more gold.

But all they found under the cover was a long brass trumpet.

"It's Mrs. Weedon's spirit trumpet," Miss Andrews told the sweating boys, when they came to her with their unusual find.

"Spirit trumpet?" repeated Rusty, searching the woman's face. "What do you mean?"

"I can't explain it," the speaker gingerly touched the recovered article, so peculiarly put away by its odd owner before her death. "But George's grandmother had the strange power of making voices sound in this trumpet. I heard the voices myself."

"Spirit voices?" Rusty inquired skeptically.

The woman nodded.

"Let's have it," Rusty reached quickly for the trumpet. But when he put the small end to his left ear he heard nothing. Nor were the others any more successful.

"What are we going to do with it?" inquired George, showing by the way he looked at the trumpet that he didn't think very highly of it.

"Evidently your grandmother placed a high value on it or else she wouldn't have hid it. So you had better keep it," Rusty advised.

"Sure thing," laughed Turk. "Put it under your bed. And some dark night when you wake up it'll probably start talking to you."

"I'd drop dead," confessed George, "if it did."

"We might try it out in some graveyard," suggested Rusty.

Jessie shuddered, for not only was she thinking of the weird trumpet, but of certain sealed rooms that were a constant mystery to her.

"Oh, keep still," she cried. "You make me nervous."

Later that night when the boys were in their own room in the west wing George did some figuring.

"If we split it three ways," he spoke thoughtfully, "it'll be six hundred dollars apiece."

"Split what three ways?" Rusty inquired.

"Why, the money that my grandmother hid in the wall."

"Who are you going to split it with?"

"You and Turk, of course."

"Talk sense," grunted Rusty. "It isn't our money. It's yours."

"As though I'd keep it all!"

"And why not? It'll take every cent you've got to put you through college."

"But I want you fellows to have something," George persisted, generous lad that he was. "If it hadn't been for you I might never have gotten anything."

"Give us the trumpet," joked Rusty, "and we'll be satisfied."

"How would it be if I bought each of you a nice bicycle?"

"Oh, dry up. You aren't Rockefeller."

"I'm hoping," Turk put in, as he slid out of his clothes, "that the workmen will find still more gold to-morrow."

"They should," considered Rusty, "if the old lady was as rich as the neighbors said."

"Didn't you get any money at all from Mr. Lind?" Turk turned to the young heir.

"No," George shook his head.

"But you have the sixteen hundred dollars that Aunt Minnie paid you for the old house."

"Sure thing. Mr. Greenor put it in the bank for me. The eighteen hundred dollars that was found to-day gives me a total of three thousand four hundred dollars."

"What are you going to do with the old tavern?" Rusty then inquired.

"Mr. Greenor talks of selling it. But I can't imagine that he'll find a buyer."

"I wish someone would buy it and donate it to the Boy Scouts," Turk spoke longingly.

"You can have it for all of me," George said generously.

"Listen to him!" jeered Rusty, kicking off his shoes. "He'll be presenting the town with a new public library next."

It was a warm night, and having buttoned himself into his pajamas the leader went downstairs to get a drink.

"Now we'll have some fun," laughed Turk, getting out a small pill box.

"What is it?" inquired George, squinting eagerly at the contents of the box.

"Itch powder. I got it from Buddy."

George tried out some of the harmless looking powder on the back of his own neck.

"Holy cow!" he danced. "It sure makes a fellow itch all right."

The room contained two beds. Having appropriated the widest one for their own use, the two giggling tricksters emptied their box of itch powder into the other one, taking care to spread the powder around so that it wouldn't be noticed.

Then, hearing steps on the stairs they jumped into bed, pulling the sheet around them.

Tom came into the room.

"Where's Rusty?" he inquired.

"Downstairs getting a drink," informed Turk, raising his head.

"Did he tell you that Colonel Dickey has a job for you to-morrow?"

"Sure thing."

"How do you and the Colonel get along?" Tom felt prompted to inquire.

"Fine and dandy. But I think he likes Rusty the best."

"I'd like to know how he can tell you apart," laughed the older brother.

Turk lowered his voice.

"We fixed Rusty," he giggled.

"What do you mean?"

"We sprinkled itch powder all over his sheets."

"It's all right to have a little fun," cautioned Tom. "But don't start a rough-house. Remember that you're in someone else's home. And whatever you do keep out of the east wing."

"Why?" came the quick inquiry.

Tom sat down on the bed.

"I wouldn't want you to repeat this in front of Aunt Minnie," he spoke in a low voice, "but the older neighbors tell the story that Mrs. Andrews, who died in the east wing, was almost as queer as George's grandmother. They were both spiritualists. And it was Mrs. Andrews' peculiar orders that her rooms were to be closed after her death and kept closed."

"I often wondered why the shades were pulled down on that side of the house," said Turk.

"Aunt Minnie has carried out her mother's

instructions. But she never mentions it—at least she never said a word about it to me, which shows plainly enough how she feels about it. So keep your mouth shut. And stay on your own side of the house, as I tell you."

"How long has Mrs. Andrews been dead?" came Turk's interested inquiry.

"Seven years."

"And have the rooms been closed all that time?"

"So I understand."

"Br-r-r-r!" the speaker shivered. "It makes me feel creepy to talk about it."

"I don't believe in spiritualism," declared Tom, in that steady way of his. "Nor do I believe that Aunt Minnie actually heard spirit voices in the trumpet, as she said. Either she was tricked or she let her imagination get away with her. Yet it *would* be an interesting experiment to try out the trumpet in a room that supposedly was tenanted by its former owner."

Turk's head disappeared under the sheet.

"Call me at daybreak," he cried, letting on that the mere suggestion of entering the sealed rooms with the spirit trumpet had scared him out of his wits.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HIDDEN GOOSE

In building what he intended should be the biggest and showiest residence in the then growing village of Manton Corners (the name was later shortened to Manton), Mr. Arnold Andrews, the community's leading merchant and manufacturer, had taken his design from the southern states, where massive front columns predominate. And because of the great amount of money that he had put into the place, and the care with which it had been kept up, it was still a noticeable dwelling.

But it lacked the compactness and conveniences of the modern homes that surrounded it. For easy housekeeping it was much too large, as was the ornamented lawn that surrounded it. And the neighbors wondered if the wealthy owner wouldn't some day tear the house down and build a place more in keeping with her needs, using the spare land, now of considerable value, for other buildings.

As a matter of fact Miss Andrews did frequently wish that she had fewer rooms to care

for, and at times the continued quietness of the big house depressed her. So it was a happy moment for her when her young friends moved in. They brought life and gayety. She loved to hear their almost constant laughter and the patter of their feet on the stairs. What had been a well-ordered house, beautifully though primly furnished, was now a merry, livable home.

Nor was the kindly woman content to go to bed that night until she had a final look at the twins. *Her* boys! That is the way she thought of them. And loving them dearly, she wanted to make sure that they were comfortable in their new quarters.

She even wished, as she stepped into the carpeted hall, the papered walls of which were decorated with old-fashioned steel engravings in heavy gilt frames and odd bric-a-brac, that she could keep the twins with her forever.

Coming to a closed door, partly concealed by a somber black drape, she paused instinctively and listened, her heart, for the moment, seeming to delay its beats. Tick-tock! Tick-tock! Tick-tock! What she heard was the clock, another antique, farther down the hall. From the closed room there came no sound. Many times during the past seven years she had listened here, always ill at ease, yet never in all that time had she heard the slightest sound from beyond the locked door. Yet she felt that some day she would

hear a sound, and that is what frightened her.

Then she hurried on to the twins' room as she caught the sound of muffled boyish laughter.

"I bet it's bedbugs," Turk's voice came to her through the closed door.

"Huh!" grunted Rusty.

"Do you itch all over?"

"Oh, shut up!"

"How about you, George?" Turk then inquired of his giggling bed-fellow.

"I'm all right."

"So am I," Turk affirmed contentedly.

"What did you guys put in my bed?" Rusty demanded.

"Us?" came the innocent inquiry.

"Oh, I know you."

"He thinks we put bugs in his bed," Turk spoke to his companion.

"How funny," said George.

And then they both laughed.

"Dog-gone the measly stuff!" cried Rusty. "It makes me itch all over."

"Maybe it's some kind of a disease," was Turk's cheerful suggestion.

"I know!" cried George. "It's the trumpet itch. You got it from my grandmother's old trumpet."

"I'd like to use the trumpet on your head."

"Maybe it's some kind of spirit itch," put in Turk, thinking of the closed rooms.

"I'll get even with you guys."

"Shall I get you a curry comb?" Turk offered pleasantly.

"You'll need to get yourself a new nose if I take a crack at you."

"But why pick on *me?*"

The listener tapped lightly on the door.

"Spooks!" instantly cried Turk.

"It's Aunt Minnie," the woman informed. "May I come in?"

Having removed the lower part of his pajamas, the better to dig at his itching legs, Rusty leaped into bed with his chums.

"I just wanted to make sure that you were settled comfortably for the night," the kindly house owner told them, when given permission to enter.

Turk laughed.

"George and I are comfortable. But Rusty seems to be having trouble."

"They put bugs in my bed, Aunt Minnie," the scratcher complained.

"Bugs?" the word was spoken quickly.

"I itch all over," the tricked one further complained.

"Laws-a-me!" came the alarmed exclamation. "Surely you don't mean bedbugs."

Hurrying across the room the concerned housekeeper gave the empty bed minute inspection, fearful of what she might discover.

"There isn't a bug in sight," she declared, the relief that she felt showing in her voice.

And how the two tricksters laughed!

But shortly they, too, began to scratch.

"I'm glad of it," cried Rusty, when told that he was the cause of their itching. And determined to make them suffer as much as possible he further rubbed his bare legs against theirs.

"Cut it out," screeched Turk, hanging to the edge of the bed.

"How do you like it?" cried Rusty, gleefully rubbing his bare feet up and down the other's spine.

"Sufferin' cats!"

"How about you, George?" the leader then turned on the other trickster.

"Get away from me!" bawled George.

"Oh, no!" cooed Rusty. "Let's cuddle up."

"Oh-h-h-h!" the cuddled one howled, as the itch powder began to work.

"I think," laughed the amused spectator, as the upheaval in the bed grew worse, "that I'd better go back to my own room."

She met Tom in the hall, who told her about the itch powder. And how they laughed when three semi-naked forms flashed by them on the way to the bathtub.

While the boys were washing themselves (all three having piled into the tub together), Jessie

wearily put fresh sheets on their beds. So they spent a comfortable night, Rusty and Turk occupying one bed and George the other.

"Did you hear the birds?" inquired Rusty the following morning, when he and his chums were dressing.

"What birds?" yawned Turk, wholly unmindful of the glorious summer world without his chamber window.

"Why, the birds in the trees, of course."

"What about them?" came the added yawn, as the speaker tried unsuccessfully to pull his left shoe onto his right foot.

"They woke me up at daybreak."

"I'm glad it wasn't me."

"Sleepyhead!"

"What are you fellows going to do to-day?" George then inquired.

Turk gave a weary sigh.

"Weed onions, I suppose."

"Whose onions?"

"Colonel Dickey's."

"Guess again," put in Rusty, better informed on the scheduled work.

Turk searched his brother's face.

"He wants us to help him clean and rearrange his curios," Rusty explained.

"Hot dog!" cried Turk, in better spirits.

"I helped him clean his arrowheads last week,"

added Rusty. "They sure needed it, for they had been in their case for years."

"Some of his stuff is junk," said Turk.

"It looks like junk to us," said Rusty. "But he treasures it."

"Imagine anybody paying a thousand dollars for a cracked vase," grunted Turk.

"Did he do that?" George inquired quickly.

"Sure thing."

"Just the same," defended Rusty, "it is a pretty vase, even if it is cracked. Nor is there another one like it in the whole world. That's why it's so valuable."

George gave a queer laugh.

"If he'd cough up a thousand dollars for a cracked vase, I wonder what he'd pay for the Maharaja's goose?"

"Whose goose?" inquired Rusty, searching his chum's eyes.

"The Maharaja's goose. Didn't you ever hear about it?"

"No."

"My pa told me about it when I was a little fellow. It was a mechanical goose, he said. When wound up it laid golden eggs—just like the goose in the fable. And my grandmother hid it."

Getting the complete story of the marvelous hidden goose, the twins were excited.

"And you say your pa searched for it when he was a boy?" inquired Rusty.

"Sure thing," nodded George. "He told me all about it, as I say—how it was hidden by my grandmother (only she wasn't my grandmother then because she hadn't been married) and how he used to search for it. All of the kids knew about it, he said. So I took it for granted that you knew about it, too."

Turk wanted to start for the old tavern right away.

"I bet *we* can find it," he spoke with boyish confidence.

"My pa seemed to think," added George, "that it was hidden in a cave, or some place like that. But I could find no caves near the old tavern. And certainly my grandmother didn't carry it far."

"If we can find it," Rusty predicted, "Colonel Dickey will buy it, for he's crazy over stuff like that."

"I'd like to keep it," said George.

"But you'd be foolish to keep it," was the practical view that the leader took, "if you could get ten thousand dollars for it."

"And you say it was made by a Hindu?" Turk put in, fascinated by the unusual story.

"Sure thing. But he wasn't an ordinary Hindu. He was a Maharaja."

"What's that?"

"A ruler."

"Did he make the goose himself?"

"So Pa told me."

"And it worked?"

"So perfectly," nodded George, "that it was put in a temple and worshiped by the Maharaja's subjects. Then it was stolen, like I told you. And later, when it had come into my great-grandfather's possession, it was hidden by my grandmother in her sleep. At least she said she was asleep when she put it away. But a lot of the neighbors who knew her well declared that the dead Maharaja came to her in spirit form and made her hide it. And because she was a spiritualist herself she was never permitted to tell where it was. But it's somewhere near the old tavern. There's no doubt of that."

"If you had told us about it when we were there," said Rusty, "we might have found it."

"I wish I had," said George.

"Let's go back to-morrow," was Turk's eager suggestion.

Nor were they content until they had again explored the old log tavern from top to bottom, hoping, of course, that the long hidden goose would come to light. Boys are that way. But they found nothing, either in or near the old building. And then, in the excitement attending the Colonel's unexpected purchase of a new automobile (for the first day that he and Rusty took it out they ran it up a tree!), the marvelous goose was temporarily forgotten.

CHAPTER XV

COLONEL DICKEY'S SECRET

COLONEL DICKEY'S erratic, warm-hearted, hot-headed ways puzzled his neighbors. They said he was queer. Yet in certain circles it was generally agreed that the Southerner was a fine, public-spirited old gentleman. His name was rarely mentioned in connection with local charitable enterprises, though it was known to a favored few that he gave generously to all worthy causes, usually on condition that the source of the helpful contribution be withheld from the newspapers.

His square wooden house, a well-preserved landmark of near-colonial days, was surrounded by a wide, shady lawn, which in turn was enclosed by a stone wall of beautiful design. This paling had been built for a purpose. A barrier it was, erected by an impulsive old gentleman who disliked boys, to discourage youthful trespassing. Even the carrier boy had been instructed to leave his morning and evening newspapers at the fancy front gate.

But, as we know, all this had been changed,

thanks to the sagacious Y.M.C.A. secretary. No longer was the pleasing retreat closed to the neighborhood's youth. Boys were seen running like monkeys up and down the broad stone wall. Their happy voices rang through the long-silent rooms. And the old Colonel liked it! At times, as the lively Scouts gathered around him to learn more about the promised camping trip (and what a clamoring bunch they were!), he acted not unlike a youngster himself.

A lover of horses, he had earlier declared to his cronies that he never would buy an automobile. And long after his neighbors had given up their tasseled surreys and drawn carts he appeared in the streets astride his favorite saddle horse. But old age overtakes horses sooner than men, and deprived of his mount, it isn't surprising that the changed old gentleman finally decided to buy a motor car.

He really needed a car, and having selected one to his liking, a sleek, shiny roadster, he taught Rusty Flannigan how to run it, having, of course, secured the necessary driving permit.

It was the owner himself, though, who had the wheel in hand the eventful day that the new car misbehaved in the country.

"I guess," he spoke wisely, when the automobile had been returned to the safety of the public highway, "that I'll let you do the driving hereafter."

Which, of course, pleased Rusty immensely, for all boys like to drive motor cars.

Unable at first to tell the Flannigan twins apart (for the boys of the same build, also had the same eyes, the same hair and the same freckles), the observing employer had soon discovered that one of the brothers did his work better than the other. In that way he came to know which was which. Turk, he agreed reflectively, was a good boy. But he liked Rusty better. And he had reason to believe, too, in selecting a driver, that the worker had the best judgment.

His interest now centered in the town's youth, particularly the Boy Scouts, the Colonel of late had been turning over various commendable boy-building schemes in his kindly mind. And having agreed to finance the proposed camping trip, as recorded, it was his further undisclosed purpose to outfit the Manton Scouts with a permanent camp.

Eyes half closed, hands arched in his lap, he loved to sit in the seclusion of his library and dream of the contemplated camp. Log houses, of course. Board houses might be satisfactory, but log houses, like those of the early pioneers, would more nearly provide the desired backwoods atmosphere. The boys might even want to build one of the small bunk houses themselves, for Scouts, he had learned, were handy with their

hatchets, and willing. It would be best, though, he concluded, to engage regular skilled carpenters to construct the larger buildings.

There would be an assembly hall with a huge fireplace at one end, suggestive of the social center of a feudal castle. The floor would be built of patterned concrete and red tile. Built-in seats would be provided along the wall, together with an abundance of movable rustic furniture. The rafters and roof beams would be built of unbarked tamarack. The log walls on the inside would be decorated with tomahawks, arrowheads of various kinds, bows and arrows, stone hatchets, peace pipes, pottery, colorful feathered headpieces and beaded work of intricate design—all taken from his own prized collection.

Having completed his plans, the old gentleman decided one day to make a confidant of his young chauffeur, who, as can be imagined, was wildly elated when he heard of the proposed camp.

"It probably will be several weeks before I advise the public of my plans," the philanthropist concluded. "So say nothing about it to the other boys, not even your own brother."

"Gee-miny crickets, Mr. Dickey!" Rusty burst out, like the warm-hearted boy that he was. "You sure are a swell guy to do all this for the Scouts. They'll appreciate it. Nor will you ever be sorry, for boys like to do what is right if given any encouragement."

Even men of the Colonel's advanced age enjoy praise.

"Then you like the idea as a whole?" he smiled.

"Do I *like* it?" Rusty gave vent to another boyish outburst, his eyes shining like twin stars. "Oh, gee! I think it's *wonderful.*"

"Probably the biggest problem of all," the camp builder resumed, with a thoughtful nod, "will be to find a suitable location. For the sake of convenient transportation, we ought to stay reasonably close to town. Yet the wilder and more unfrequented the place the better. It may be that the river, with its wooded shores, will provide exactly the place we need. And if such a favorable tract is available, we'll then enjoy the added advantage of water transportation."

Rusty could contain himself no longer.

"I know a swell place, Mr. Dickey. It's down the river at Pegleg Ford. There's an old tavern there, built of logs. The roof is a wreck. But you can easily build a new one. And will the lower part ever make a swell assembly hall! Oh, baby! The upstairs can be used for bunk rooms. There's a fireplace, too. And *big?* Say, fat old Saint Nick himself could easily slide down that chimney without scraping his collar button."

"How far is it from town?" came the interested inquiry.

"About eight miles."

"Can we reach it by road?"

"Not unless you want to walk through a cow pasture. But the tavernkeeper's original road can easily be fixed up."

Colonel Dickey never delayed long in making a decision.

"I'd like to see the place," he spoke briskly. "So let us get started at once. If it is the ideal camp site that you picture, I'll buy it immediately. By quick work we can put the camp in shape for early use. And August is an ideal camping month."

There was no complaint from the enthusiastic camp builder when he encountered the briary blackberry thickets in the long-deserted gravelly trail that at one time had led into the shallow river on one side and out on the other. This was fun! Occasionally he stopped and looked back, as though to make sure that he was leaving civilization far behind him. For what boy, with probable camp sites in mind, and the tang of God's great out of doors in his nostrils, cares to be reminded that there are church steeples and grimy factory chimneys a few rods away? The extent of the forest that surrounded the old tavern, and the size of the trees, delighted the inspector. Certainly, he told himself, he had showed unusual wisdom in making a confidant of his informed young chauffeur. Otherwise he might never have heard of this enchanting place.

Arriving at the tavern, and first studying it from all sides, he gave closer attention to its general construction. Very little would have to be done to the substantial log walls. But the roof was gone, as he had been told. And practically every floor in the house would have to be rebuilt. But if he could buy the place, with its surrounding land, for five thousand dollars, it would be a good investment.

A chum of the owner, and also an employee of the intended buyer, Rusty was thoughtful when the matter of price was brought up. For George's sake he wanted the land to bring a good price. On the other hand he didn't want the Colonel to pay more than the place was actually worth.

"I'm quite sure," he spoke honestly, recalling that George had offered to give the tavern away, "that you can buy the property for less than five thousand dollars."

"Then you know the owner?" came the quick inquiry.

"Yes, sir," Rusty nodded, further explaining how he and George had become acquainted.

"Well, well," laughed the old gentleman, as he regarded the stairs on which the "apparition" had made its unexpected appearance, as described. "This is very interesting. And now that we know that a 'ghost' has been seen here, I'm more eager than ever to buy the place. For if there's

one thing needed to complete a boys' camp it's a haunted house."

"And you really believe that the place is worth five thousand dollars?"

"If there is as much wooded land as you claim, it may be worth even more than that. Mr. Greenor will know. I'll have a talk with him this evening, hoping, of course, that we can come to a mutually satisfactory agreement."

Five thousand dollars! George certainly was a lucky boy, Rusty told himself, thinking of the other fortune that the orphan had in the bank. Nor was there a particle of envy in the young chauffeur's heart. He was only too glad that the mistreated young heir had come into his own.

Colonel Dickey shook his head when he saw the deep, dark cellar.

"It will be best, I think, to fill up this hole when we remodel the interior."

"Why not leave it?" laughed Rusty. "Then if any of the campers get fresh we can chuck them in here and cool them off."

The Colonel, too, loved to joke.

"Why not chuck them in the river?" he suggested.

Later he and Rusty studied the river bank, discussing such matters as a boat landing and swimming pool. For, of course, no camp would be complete without a pool. And the Scouts' parents might wisely question the safety of the

river itself, which frequently was too muddy to permit of sensible bathing.

"As for shrubbery," the old gentleman gave that matter his final attention, "we have all of the bushes and young trees that we need. I'll help transplant them in season, for I've had considerable experience along that line, landscape gardening having been a hobby of mine since early boyhood. We probably can arrive at some very beautiful and unique effects. In fact," the speaker enthused, "this ought to be an outstanding camp when we get through with it."

"Thanks to you," Rusty put in feelingly.

"If I can satisfy myself that I am building better boys," was the quiet reply, "I'll feel amply repaid."

"Well, I know one boy who's going to be as good as he can," Rusty promised faithfully.

And how hard it was for him that night to keep his secret! For, of course, the proposed camp was uppermost in his mind. Five thousand dollars! No wonder his eyes twinkled when he looked at George.

"What *is* the matter with you?" Jessie finally felt constrained to inquire.

"Oh," grunted Turk, "he thinks he's smart just because he knows how to drive that old car."

"Old car, your granny," Rusty quickly defended his employer's property. "If anybody happens to ask you it cost two thousand bucks."

"I could drive it, too," Turk bragged.

"What?" Rusty jeered in fun. "A little squirt like you? Don't make me laugh."

He thought, of course, as he strutted around, that his brother's ill nature was all put on. For neither had ever before envied the other. But Turk was truthfully envious now. *He* had to weed onions and push a lawn mower, was the trend of his disgruntled thoughts, while his luckier brother rode around in a swell automobile. It wasn't fair. And it was then that the decision was arrived at, by the sullen boy, to take the situation into his own hands.

Poor Turk! What that impetuous decision was to cost himself and those who loved him he little realized. And may his later mistake be a lesson to other headstrong boys.

Jessie was delighted when Rusty drove up to the house the following afternoon, having been told by his generous employer to take his sister and crippled brother for a ride.

"I'm going, too," cried Turk. Then, when the four were crowded into the car's single seat, he begged to drive. "Aw, come on, Rusty. Please. I know how, for I drove Mr. Allen's flivver the other day. Honest I did. Don't be stingy."

But Rusty wouldn't hear to such a thing. Not that he was "stingy," as his insistent brother said. But being responsible for the safety of the car,

he rightly felt that it was his duty to handle it himself.

Turk sulked throughout the pleasing drive. Nor did Jessie and the beaming young driver suspect what was going on in the disgruntled one's mind.

"He thinks he's smart," Turk grumbled to himself, over and over again. "But I'll show him. Maybe not to-day, but some day. I can drive as good as he can, and I've got just as much right to the car as he has."

It was his determination to take the car in hand some day when Rusty's back was turned, thus proving to all concerned that there was more than one good driver in the family. Nor did he question his ability to manipulate the levers and pedals.

His opportunity soon came. Two days later Rusty drew up to the house to leave word with his sister that he wouldn't be home to supper. Needing a clean handkerchief he ran inside. And when he came out the car was gone!

Also his twin brother was gone from the front porch.

"He should have a good flogging for this," cried Jessie, when the situation had been explained by the uneasy chauffeur. "And I'm going to make it my business to see that he's taken in hand, too, when Tom comes home from the store."

Ten minutes passed; then twenty minutes; and still no sign of the returning driver. The anxiety of Jessie and her younger brother, who at first thought that the inexperienced driver had just gone around the block, can readily be imagined. Supper time came. But no supper was prepared, except a light lunch for Bennie.

Later, Rusty having gone miserably to report to his employer, Tom enlisted the aid of the local police.

"What?" glared the desk sergeant, when the situation had been explained to him. "Another car stolen? That makes two in one day, Bill Higgenbottom's flivver having disappeared early this afternoon."

Tom's face burned.

"I didn't say that my brother had stolen Colonel Dickey's car. He wouldn't do that. But having taken it without permission, I fear that something has happened to him."

The official was impressed by the older brother's earnestness.

"I'll see what I can do," he promised, in a modified voice, making a note of the case.

That night the streets of Manton were combed for some trace of the missing car and boy. Farmers were called to their telephones. But with no result. None of them, it seems, had noticed a stalled automobile in the roads leading out of town, though one farmer did advance the

information that a small car answering to the description of the stolen Higgenbottom machine was ditched near his home, four miles east of town.

Tom wasn't interested in this report. Fearfully upset by the unhappy affair, and realizing his responsibility, he could see no connection between the ditched Higgenbottom car and his missing brother. But there was a connection, as he learned later on.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RUNAWAY

As Tom had told the gruff desk sergeant, Turk, in driving away in the appropriated car, had no thought of stealing it. For the younger one was well enough posted on such matters to know what would happen to a boy or man who tried that. Soon caught, the thief would be thrown into jail and probably made to serve a later unhappy sentence in some gloomy prison or strict reformatory.

No, Turk was not a thief. But he was headstrong. And with his mind set on driving the costly car he refused to listen to the voice of reason. "Don't! Don't!" the inner voice remonstrated. But its warning was wasted, Turk having determined that nothing should stop him.

And, to that point, why shouldn't he drive the car around the block? He knew how to handle it. And if Rusty didn't like it he could lump it.

The car made a left-hand turn at the first corner. And had the young driver continued to turn at the subsequent corners as he came to them,

ending up where he had started from, all would have been well. But instead of turning at the second corner he kept on, unable to resist the temptation to try out the high-powered car on one of the smooth country roads. Still, he didn't intend to be gone more than five minutes.

But having traveled a pleasant mile he decided to make it two; then three. There was no harm in it, he argued. Due for a scolding anyway, he might just as well have as much fun as possible while he was about it. And by going a bit faster he could get back that much sooner.

So he pressed on the foot throttle, watching the speedometer climb from twenty to thirty miles an hour. No trick at all to keep *this* finely balanced car on the road, he told himself. It was dead easy. And soon he was going forty.

Every part of the splendid car worked perfectly. And so quickly did he speed along the highway that he began to wonder, with increased daring, just how fast the car really could go.

Nor did he slow up, or pull over to the right-hand side of the road, as the law required, when another and smaller car came up behind him.

Both cars were now traveling at a high rate of speed. And Turk should have had the good sense to let the smaller car go by. But the persistent horn as it kept honking behind him was a challenge. As though he *would* let a little old cookie cutter like that pass him! Why, he had

more power in one cylinder than the other car had in four.

Higher and higher crept the warning finger of the speedometer. Forty-five, fifty, fifty-five miles an hour. In the road ahead lay a jagged broken bottle, that dreaded enemy of pneumatic tires. But Turk, as he breathlessly gripped the steering wheel, had no eyes for broken bottles. One of the rear wheels struck the bottle squarely. And in the terrific explosion that followed, the highly-inflated tire, of course, having blown up, the young driver was almost scared out of his wits. Swerving, the heavy car narrowly escaped going into the ditch that paralleled the country road, then skidded sideways along the roadbed, coming to a shivering, grinding pause, hidden for a moment or two in the dust clouds that it had stirred up.

To avoid a collision the driver of the smaller car gave his steering wheel a quick jerk. Then there was a crash of glass as the light car, after a complete turnover, landed on its side in the ditch.

Conscious of the destruction that he had wrought, and appalled beyond words, Turk's first thought was to run away and hide. Wild terror clutched his heart. They could put him in jail for this, came the fearful thought, and probably would. Oh, how he wished that he had left the

car alone! But such thoughts availed him nothing now.

Nor could he run away, as he wanted to do. For his trembling legs lacked their usual strength. In fact, he hardly was able to stand on his feet when, after considerable nervous fumbling with the door latch, he finally got out of the car. First he looked at his own ruined tire. Then he turned, with horrified eyes, as the driver of the ditched car limped into sight, blood trickling from minor cuts in his face and hands.

"So you're the bird who ran me off the highway, huh?" the owner of the wrecked car descended on the white-faced young offender, his own eyes blazing with anger.

"I—I don't know much about driving a car," Turk admitted wretchedly, little realizing how foolish his words sounded.

"How old are you?" the question was snapped out.

"Twelve."

"Got a driver's permit?"

"No."

"Boy," the speaker's eyes showed evil satisfaction, "what the judge will do to you when he hears about this will be just too bad. Ever been in jail before?"

"No," the word was spoken miserably.

"Well," came grimly, "you'll like it in time."

There was a short silence then as the injured driver took care of his wounds.

"Let me help you," offered Turk, producing his own handkerchief.

It turned out that the man wasn't as badly injured as the flow of blood suggested. And having bandaged up the worst wound on his left hand he took a closer look at the car that had caused the damage.

"Your old man's?" he finally inquired of Turk, regarding the trembling boy in a calculating way.

"No."

And hoping to arouse the man's sympathy, Turk further explained that he was an orphan. The car, he said, which he had borrowed without permission, belonged to Colonel Dickey.

A cunning light came into the man's eyes.

"But if you're a poor boy, as you claim, who's going to settle with me for the damage to my own car?"

"I don't know," faltered Turk.

"I can send you to jail for this."

The guilty one completely lost his nerve.

"Oh, don't do that," he begged, his face showing the misery that he felt. "Please don't."

The man lowered his voice.

"Listen, kid, I'm going to tell you the truth: That isn't my car in the ditch. It's one I picked up in Manton. You know what I mean—I borrowed it. See? The owner will expect me to

settle for the damages if you can't. So the best thing for us to do, as I see it, is to change the tire on your car and beat it."

Turk was staring now.

"You mean," he gasped, "that you want me to run away with you?"

"Sure thing," grinned the man. "You'd rather do that, wouldn't you, than go to jail? Besides, a kid of your age, liking adventures and everything, ought to be glad of the chance to travel around with an experienced guy like me."

"But I don't want to run away," cried Turk, thinking of his sister and brothers.

"You'd rather go to jail, huh?"

"Oh, no," wailed the grief-stricken boy.

"Then come along with me," the words were spoken persuasively. "I'll protect you. I have a hang-out in Detroit. Then, when this trouble of yours has blowed over, and you're safe from jail, you can come home."

Turk didn't want to go. And he tried to hold out against the persuasive promises made to him. But in the end he gave in. And the spare tire having been put into use the stolen car was driven down the highway at a terrific rate of speed, the thief congratulating himself that in the loss of the stolen Higgenbottom car he had gotten a still more valuable one. And by taking Turk with him he left no clues behind.

Darkness came. Yet on and on the car sped,

past farmhouses and through small villages. Once the driver stopped for gasoline and oil at a lonely roadside filling station. There was talk between the attendant and his customer about the roads leading into Milwaukee. But the clever car thief had no intention of heading in that direction.

"I just did it to throw the dicks off our trail," he later explained to his miserable companion.

Turk later dropped asleep, for he was worn out. And when he opened his eyes he saw the round morning sun climbing out of a scraggly thicket of stunted oak trees. For a brief instant he failed to comprehend where he was and what had happened to him. Then complete understanding returned to him with a rush. And with it came the old misery.

The car was parked in a thicket beside a lonely country road. And as Turk climbed out and stretched his legs he caught sight of the driver, now sound asleep on the ground. The man's deep breathing and the occasional purr of a distant motor car were the only sounds that fell on the awakened one's ears.

Convinced that there was an automobile highway a short distance away, off which the car thief had turned to get some needed secret sleep, Turk started out afoot. Nor had he gone far before

his shoes were full of sand. Then, rounding a turn, he found himself in the open. The arid country, with its occasional weed clumps, stretched out ahead of him. Continuing along the sandy road, he shortly came to a concrete highway over which automobiles already were speeding. On the guideboard were two arrows, one pointing north, to Chicago, and the other pointing east, to Detroit. And thus Turk knew that the stolen car had been driven through Chicago some time during the night while he was asleep.

Homesick and heartsick, and having no other choice, he started back down the sandy road, tears blinding his steps as he walked first in one wheel track and then in the other. In imagination he could see his beloved sister and brothers. Tom, so steady and so kind . . . laughing Jessie . . . little Bennie with his often pathetic face . . . and jolly old Rusty. Oh, what wouldn't the miserable runaway have given just then to be back in his own bed, within touch of his brother's warm body.

"But I can't go back," he cried miserably. "If I do they'll put me in jail. And that will be even worse than running away. No," he repeated, "I can't go back. I've got to keep on and fight my own battles. And maybe I'll grow up and never see Tom and Jessie again. Oh, I wish I could take yesterday and squeeze it out of my life!"

"I wish you could," a gruff voice spoke behind him. And when he wheeled he found a strange man standing near the parked car.

"Who—who are you?" faltered the startled boy, hopeful that it wasn't a sheriff.

The man laughed coarsely.

"Guess I surprised you, huh?"

Turk nodded.

"My name's Bill Schultz. I'm a pal of Charley's. He picked me up in Chicago last night when you were asleep."

The thought of traveling with such men sickened Turk, for their faces showed plainly enough what they were.

"Are *you* going to Detroit, too?" the boy finally inquired.

"Sure thing."

Here the other thief appeared in the road, still drowsy, as his eyes showed, from lack of sleep.

"Time for breakfast," he yawned. Then he turned to Turk. "There's a farmhouse over there in the hollow," he pointed. "So while Bill and I are getting the sandwiches ready, suppose you take a hike down the road and buy some milk. Here's the money."

"And keep your mug closed about who we are and where we're from," cautioned Schultz.

On the way to the farmhouse Turk came to a quick decision. No longer would he share the hazardous life of the two thieves who had

brought him here. He would run away from them. Yes, he would run on and on along this sandy road. He didn't care where it led or what lay ahead of him. His only desire was to get as far away from his evil companions as he could.

CHAPTER XVII

DARK DAYS

TURK's disappearance brought depression and heartache to the occupants of the big white house. No longer were the sunny rooms filled with care-free youthful laughter. At mealtime the Flannigan children gathered around the table in their own side of the house with long, anxious faces. There was little conversation. And Bennie, the least able of them all to control his emotions, very often looked at the empty chair through swimming eyes.

"Isn't Turk ever coming home?" he inquired, over and over again, for the passing days had brought no news of the runaway. It would almost seem that the earth at his feet had yawned and engulfed him, so completely had he disappeared. The police were not only baffled but chagrinned. A fine state of affairs, they grumbled, to be thus outwitted by a twelve-year-old boy. In desperation they drew their nets tighter, considering every possible theory from abduction to murder, but with no success.

In her own side of the big house Miss An-

drews was as quiet and depressed as the missing one's own relatives. For she, too, loved the boy dearly. His failings, so common with most boys of his age, had never been hidden from her. And particularly had she cautioned him in her kindly manner about his headstrong ways. But there was nothing bad about him. Long ago she had convinced herself of that. And now his continued absence grieved and worried her.

Her workmen having cleared the old foundation of the dismantled cottage, the new home that the Flannigan children were to occupy that fall was gradually taking shape. But the builder seemed now to have lost some of her enthusiasm. The work lagged. Nor did she complain of the delay, though earlier she had urged the contractor to complete the job as soon as possible.

Colonel Dickey, of course, was greatly concerned over the loss of his costly motor car. Yet, loyal friend that he was, he refused to believe that the car had been stolen. The Flannigan boy had met with some strange catastrophe. Such was the old gentleman's belief. And he was anxious to see the mystery cleared up.

It was still his intention to buy the tavern and its adjoining land. But upon investigation he learned that there was considerable doubt about the validity of the title, which temporarily held up the deal. But he was still hopeful that he would be able to open the camp in August.

And it was his added hope that Turk would be there to enjoy the camp's advantages with the other Scouts.

Rusty, though, took no interest in the proposed camp. Nor was he ever on hand any more to discuss the project with his former employer. This hurt the old gentleman, for he had enjoyed every minute of his friendly association with the bright-eyed, purposeful boy. And determined to resume the old relations, if possible, he one day set out with stiff, jerky steps in the direction of the Flannigan home.

Jessie met him at the door, the worry deepening in her eyes when she recognized him. But contrary to her expectations he said nothing about the vanished car. Nor did he mention the missing brother. It was Rusty that he talked about. And when he asked bluntly why the favored boy had evaded him, the emotional girl, to whom tears were now a daily comfort, began to weep.

"Oh, Mr. Dickey!" she cried, with streaming eyes. "I know I'm acting silly. But please forgive me. We're all so worried about Turk. And we're so ashamed of what he did, Rusty in particular, who really thinks just as much of you as you do of him. But he can't bear to face you after what happened. For he feels, in letting the car get out of his hands, that he didn't measure up to your trust in him."

"It is rather hard on me," was the kindly way in which the visitor expressed himself, "to lose both my new car and my best boy friend. And I'll appreciate it greatly if you'll send him over to my house to-morrow morning."

"I'll tell him," Jessie promised.

"I hold nothing against him," added the visitor. "He's still as dear to me as ever. And instead of evading me, he'll feel better, I think, if he gives me the opportunity to prove my continued friendship for him."

"I'll have a talk with him to-night," Jessie further promised, "and I'll try to make him understand how you feel toward him. He's very proud. It's his nature. Had Turk been more like him, this awful thing never would have happened. We can depend on Rusty. He always takes the right course. But Turk was impulsive. He was easily led. So there's no telling what happened to him."

"You've heard nothing from him?" came the kindly inquiry.

"No, sir. Nor do we know whether he's in Chicago, as the police think, or thousands of miles from here. If only we knew where he was we wouldn't feel so badly about him. But the uncertainty—the thought of what he might be doing——"

Arising, the courteous old gentleman placed a comforting hand on the girl's shoulder.

"I think you're worrying too much, my dear, which is bad for you. I'm sure that everything will turn out all right, for God usually looks after the happiness and welfare of His children."

"But suppose your car has been wrecked, and Turk is in hiding?" inquired the troubled girl. "What are you going to do?"

"Nothing," the old man spoke shortly, after a brief silence.

"If the car has been wrecked," declared Jessie, "I'm sure that Tom will want to pay you for it."

And such was the older brother's intention. Tense and earnest by nature, with firmly drawn standards regarding what was honorable and what was not, Tom suffered moments of the keenest mental anguish over the disgrace of his younger brother.

What was Turk doing? What kind of a life was he leading? Over and over again the older brother asked himself these and similar questions as he lay in his tumbled bed. The clock would mount to its midnight peak and start down the cycle of a new day. One o'clock; two o'clock. Many times it was three o'clock before the restless one finally dropped asleep. When morning came he got into his clothes with a dead, drugged feeling in his head. His red eyes showed the want of proper sleep. And to speed up his lagging senses he bathed freely in cold water, then hurried away to the store.

Always in the morning he stopped at the police station. Had they heard anything? There was hope in the yearning blue eyes. But after two weeks the hope became a dying emotion and his questions came mechanically. By turns the desk sergeant was gruff and kindly. Nothing new, he reported. And so Tom's days of misery and nights of tortured wakefulness piled up one on top of another and a deadening discouragement settled over him, holding him in its unnerving grasp.

No boy or man can do good work when his mind is tortured by troubles that are a part of his home life, no more than he can do his best when forced to work in wretched surroundings with no hope of bigger and brighter things ahead. Tom daily made blunders, because his thoughts wandered. He tried to concentrate on his work. But the missing brother was constantly in his mind.

Then came a day when he ruined a vest with the hot pressing iron.

"What's the matter with you?" cried the angry head clerk. "Why don't you keep your mind on your work? You act like one in a dream."

Tom stepped back and drew a hand across his perspiring forehead.

"I'm worried about my brother," he confessed.

"Well, you've got to do better work than this if you expect to hold your job."

The following day Tom let a customer short-change him out of two dollars. It wouldn't have happened if he had had his wits about him. He saw now that something had to be done to relieve his mind or else he would be fired.

That evening he talked the matter over with his sister, George and Rusty having gone across the street to play with Buddy.

"I have a notion to go to Chicago and see if I can't induce Uncle Peter to lend us two hundred dollars. Then we could hire a detective."

Jessie straightened.

"Why, Tom!" she cried, staring. "You must be joking. Uncle Peter has no money. Besides, I thought it was understood between us that we weren't to let him know where we are?"

"But we've got to get the money somewhere," Tom spoke desperately. "The strain of not knowing where Turk is and what he's doing is getting the best of me. I've got to find him. And money will do it."

"I'd sooner have you go to Mr. Greenor than Uncle Peter, family disgrace that he is. A junk peddler! Think how we'd feel to have him come driving up the street in that old cart of his."

"He always was good to me," declared Tom loyally.

"In his way he's good to everybody. But what a way! I never say him when he wasn't dirty. And according to what Mrs. Hiller tells

me in her letters he's just as shiftless as ever. He tried to quizz her about our whereabouts. But he didn't find out anything, thank goodness. And much less than having money to lend, if you go to him he'll follow you home just as sure as anything. I'd much rather have you go to Mr. Greenor. Please, Tom."

"I'll think it over," came the promise.

"Well," greeted the desk sergeant, when the usual inquirer stopped at the police station the following morning, "I've got some news for you this trip."

Tom clutched the edge of the desk.

"You mean . . . you've found him?"

"No," the officer shook his burly head. "But we've recovered the old gent's car. The Chicago police picked up a man last night who was trying to sell it. Gave the name of Needrow. Ever hear of it?"

"No."

"Well, it's the fellow's story that your brother sold him the car for a thousand dollars."

Reeling, Tom quickly recovered himself.

"I don't believe it," he cried. "The man is lying."

"So we all think. For the fellow's a bad egg, all right. But I'm just telling you the facts."

"Did he say he bought the car from Turk in Chicago?"

"Yep."

"When?"

"The day after the car and your brother disappeared."

"Maybe he knows where Turk is," Tom spoke eagerly.

"If he does the Chicago police will pry it out of him."

Hurrying from the police station to the store Tom quickly sought his employer.

"I'm in trouble, Mr. Greenor. I need help. And there's no one I can turn to but you."

The kindly merchant was disturbed by the clerk's white face.

"What's the matter, Tom?" he inquired quickly. "Tell me about it."

Thus invited, the boy told his story, the grief and worry that he felt in his heart shaping itself into passionate, appealing words. The business man, of course, had heard about the vanished automobile. But Tom took nothing for granted. He told everything, from beginning to end.

"I'm afraid," he concluded, "that if the Chicago police find Turk first he'll be forced to tell things that will make it harder for him to clear himself later on. That's why I want to hire a detective."

"You did right, Tom, in coming to me with your troubles," the merchant spoke feelingly. "I'll be glad to help you, for that is an employer's responsibility."

That evening Tom told Jessie of his talk with Mr. Greenor, who had agreed to get in touch with a first-class detective agency, hoping, of course, that the missing brother would quickly be located and returned in safety to his home.

"It's wonderful to have friends like that," cried Jessie, with shining eyes. "And like you I feel a thousand times better. To-morrow I'm going over Turk's clothes and get everything mended and ready for him, for something tells me that it won't be many days now before he's home again."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE NEW ROOMER

Miss Andrews was working in her garden the following afternoon when Rusty suddenly leaped the board fence, landing almost on top of her.

"Gee-miny crickets, Aunt Minnie," he started. "I didn't expect to find you here."

"What in the world is the matter with you?" inquired the curious gardener, as the newcomer backed away from her, holding the seat of his pants.

"I've got a rip," he grinned.

"A rip?" she repeated the word.

"A rip in the seat of my pants," he more fully explained.

She saw now why he had come home by way of the unfrequented alley. And she observed, too, that his nose had been bleeding.

"I had a fight with Henny Lind," he told her, reading her thoughts. "We were in a bunch down the street. The kids asked me about Turk, and when Henny spoke up and called Turk a thief, I started something."

As a girl Miss Andrews had been led to be-

lieve that only bad boys got into fist fights. But she had long ago outgrown that silly idea. There were times, she realized, when boys had to fight. Their honor depended on it. And favoring Rusty she was grimly hopeful now that the other fighter had suffered something worse than torn pants.

"I blackened his eyes," Rusty added to his account of the fight.

"Both of them?" she smiled.

He nodded.

"Is it hard to put on patches, Aunt Minnie?" he inquired earnestly.

"Why do you ask that?"

"Well—I'd rather not let Jessie see my pants. She scolds when I get into a scrap, and she's had a lot to worry her lately."

What a manly boy he was, the woman thought, as she started impulsively toward the house.

"Come with me," she directed. "I'll mend the torn pants for you."

Then, when they were in the kitchen, she told him to turn around so that she could see the extent of the damage.

"Oh, gee, Aunt Minnie!" he blushed, still holding a pair of dirty hands over the rent. "I don't want to make a show of myself."

Smiling, she told him then to crawl under the kitchen table, the cloth of which hung almost to the floor. And when the torn pants had been

handed to her by the now half-naked fighter she set to work with her needle and thread.

"What will I tell Jessie, Aunt Minnie, if she sees the patch?" Rusty turned the matter over in his mind.

"Tell her the truth," the worker bit off a thread.

"Maybe she'll never notice it," came hopefully.

"Did Henny make your nose bleed?" the sewer then inquired, as she stitched briskly.

"A little bit."

"Did you make his nose bleed?"

"A little bit."

"What did the boys say about the fight?"

"They told me I did right."

"Well, I think you did myself," the words were spoken crisply. "But don't quarrel with Henny, or anybody else, any more than you have to."

"He's the only boy I ever did quarrel with. And I found out something else, Aunt Minnie."

"Yes?"

"It was Henny who wrecked that big kite of ours. He peppered it with shot. Hipper Jenks saw him do it, only Hipper was sore at Turk at the time and wouldn't tell us."

A bell rang.

"Gosh," cried Rusty, when told that someone was on the front porch. "I hope it isn't callers."

Miss Andrews could see the open front door at the other end of the long hall.

"It's a messenger boy," she spoke excitedly, hurrying out of the room. But contrary to her expectations the accepted message contained no news of the runaway.

Rusty, of course, was on needles and pins.

"For Pete's sake, Aunt Minnie," he squirmed in his stuffy hiding place, "please hurry and finish that patch."

But Miss Andrews had forgotten all about the uncompleted patching job.

"It's from my cousin, Milo Rollins," she referred to the puzzling telegram. "He's sending a roomer here—a young man by the name of Andy Blake."

Rusty's imagination quickly got to work.

"I bet it's Mr. Greenor's detective," he cried excitedly, having a lot of fanciful ideas about the work of professional detectives.

"No—o," the word was spoken slowly, as the woman again read the message. "Mr. Blake is an advertising man. But why my cousin should send him here is more than I can figure out. Milo ought to know that I've never bothered with roomers. I wonder if he thinks I'm getting hard up in my declining years."

"Wasn't he the man who made the Flying Gorgon?" Rusty made good use of his memory.

"Yes. And being an advertising man himself

he may have a special reason in sending Mr. Blake here. So I'll not turn the young man down until I've had a talk with him, though I can't imagine that I'd care to have him under my nose."

Rusty couldn't get the idea out of his head that there was some fanciful connection between the proposed roomer and his missing brother.

"Did your cousin know about Turk's disappearance, Aunt Minnie?"

"Yes. I wrote him a long letter last week, telling him that I had a houseful of children. Which makes his request all the more puzzling. For why should he want to add another member to my already large family? Still, as I say, he must have a secret reason. So I suppose I should take the young man in."

"The telegram may let on that he's an advertising man," theorized Rusty, "but I bet a cookie he's a detective. Mr. Rollins and Mr. Greenor are old friends. See? Mr. Rollins knew about Turk's disappearance. Then he and Mr. Greenor had a talk, the latter having gone to Chicago to hire a detective. Mr. Rollins has a bright idea. He'll let on that the hired detective is a young advertising man. And there you are!"

"Nonsense!" the word was spoken sharply. "My cousin wouldn't deceive me that way, for there's no call for it. Besides, the telegram states that Mr. Blake is one of the executives of that

new coaster-wagon concern on Water Street."

His bubble thus bursted, so to speak, Rusty later put on his patched pants and sauntered into the front yard where he encountered a nicely dressed young man who had just turned in at the gate.

"Is this where Miss Minnie Andrews lives?" the newcomer inquired.

"Yes, sir," Rusty nodded.

"My name's Andy Blake," the older one held out his hand.

"I've heard about you," Rusty grinned, giving his own name. "You've the new roomer."

"Do you live here, too?" Andy inquired curiously.

"Yes, sir."

"But I was given to understand that Miss Andrews had the big house all to herself."

"I used to live over there," Rusty pointed to where the new house was going up, further explaining that he had a sister and three brothers. "Miss Andrews didn't like us at first. But we got to be friends. And when she bought our old house, and started the new one, we came over here to live. . . . Do you sell many coaster wagons?"

"Thousands of them," Andy informed spiritedly.

"They're good coaster wagons, all right," Rusty nodded. "Buddy Allen has one. And you

should have seen the junk we loaded on it when we went camping a few weeks ago."

"I never yet have heard of one breaking down," Andy bragged.

"Buddy showed me his *Comet Coaster News,* too."

"How do you like it?" grinned Andy, thinking to himself that it would be rather interesting to live in the same house with the bright-eyed young chatter-box.

"The part about Trigger Berg is swell," praised Rusty.

"That's what all the boys tell me."

"Are you going to keep on publishing stories about him in your magazine?"

"I expect to," the speaker nodded.

"Do you write the stories yourself?"

"No. I buy them from a professional author. Which reminds me that one of his manuscripts just came in this morning. Would you like to see it?"

"Oh, boy!" the younger one's eyes danced.

"I'll bring it over when I move in," promised Andy, "and read it to you."

"If—" grinned Rusty.

"If what?" Andy grinned in turn, liking his new friend better each minute.

"If you get a room here."

"Now that I've seen the place," Andy glanced up at the showy white house with its pleasing

grounds, "I'm crazy to live here. So put in a good word for me. And between the two of us I dare say we'll be able to convince Miss Andrews that she ought to give me a home."

"You're a swell guy," Rusty then spoke with boyish frankness.

"Thanks."

"And I'm going to call you Andy if you don't mind."

"That's what I want you to call me," the words were spoken feelingly.

There was considerable talk that evening among the Flannigan children about the new roomer.

"He makes me think of you," Rusty told his older brother.

"In what way?" Tom inquired curiously.

"Well, you're both workers," was the only explanation that the younger one could give.

"I was surprised," said Jessie, "when Aunt Minnie told me that she was going to take a roomer."

"He's a friend of her cousin's," informed Rusty.

"So I understand."

Tom laughed.

"I wonder if he'll give me a job in his coaster-wagon factory. For I'd like that better than store work."

"But you can't make a change now," reminded

Jessie, referring to the obligation that had been placed on the young clerk by his employer's generosity.

"You're right," Tom spoke soberly.

"Anyway," put in Rusty, "I don't think that Andy has anything to do with the factory. He's an advertising man."

"You shouldn't call him by his given name," reproved Jessie.

"He told me to."

"You certainly got acquainted with him in a hurry," grinned Tom.

"He's that kind of a fellow," nodded Rusty. "You'll like him."

Which was no idle prediction. A warm friendship soon grew up between Tom and the new roomer. They spent many happy hours together, talking about advertising in general and juvenile advertising in particular. One Thursday afternoon Andy took his new friend through the coaster-wagon factory, Tom having explained that he had a distinct interest in machinery.

"Instead of spooks," Andy wrote to Mr. Rollins that night, "I've run across a houseful of wonderful people, chief among them your cousin, Miss Andrews. There's a boy living here who is supporting his younger sister and brothers, one of whom ran away a few weeks ago. Maybe you read about it in the newspaper. The boy (they call him Turk) drove off in a borrowed car and

hasn't been seen since. A few days ago the car was picked up in Chicago, the driver telling the story that he bought the car from the runaway for an even thousand dollars. Tom, of course, is all worked up over his brother's disappearance, though, a detective having been hired by an employer, everybody concerned seems to believe now that the runaway will soon be returned to his home. I hope so. You'd like Rusty, Turk's twin brother. As bright as a new dollar. I'm going to teach him something about advertising, for it's fun to help deserving people. And later on I may get Tom a job in the factory. That's where his heart is. Some of us, as you know, like office work the best and others favor factory work. He's a machine bug. Used to live in Chicago. But he moved here when his parents died. Did all sorts of odd jobs at first to keep the family together, but now he's working in a store. Not many boys of sixteen would want to tie themselves down as he has done. Which explains why I enjoy helping him. I thought a week ago that I'd now be holding down a desk in your office. But I'm glad you didn't hire me. I've taken a new interest in my coaster-wagon work. And my interest in the Flannigan children grows daily. As for the Maharaja's wonderful goose, I find that the Flannigans, too, have been searching for it, though with no success. There's another boy

here by the name of George Weedon, a grandson of the old spiritualist whom you told me about, who has a spirit trumpet. And I have suggested to your cousin that we hold an evening séance, hopeful, of course, that some spirit, in talking through the trumpet, will reveal the goose's hiding place. Yet, if the trumpet does speak, I dare say I'll be the most surprised one there, for I never did take any stock in such demonstrations. I'll write to you again as soon as I have anything to report."

And how Mr. Rollins smiled when he read this letter! For things were working out exactly as he had planned.

CHAPTER XIX

MORE ABOUT TRIGGER BERG

RUSTY did not let the new roomer forget about his promise to read aloud the latest Trigger Berg manuscript, as this had been prepared by a Wisconsin author of boys' books for publication in the increasingly popular *Comet Coaster News.*

So one rainy evening, having brought the manuscript home, Andy gathered the little group around him, hoping, as he began the humorous story, that it would bring cheer to the saddened family.

For the detective, as hired by Mr. Greenor, had made no headway in the puzzling case. Nor had the Chicago police learned anything of importance from the man named Needrow.

The rain, as it beat against the closed windows, had lent an unseasonable chill to the summer air. So, at Miss Andrews' suggestion, Tom kindled a light wood fire in the living-room fireplace. The mounting flames reminded Rusty of the night that he and his chums had camped in the old tavern. Would the old gang ever get together again? The boy wondered. And to

shake off his depression he ran across the street and got Buddy, realizing how much the young Comet Coaster owner would enjoy the promised story.

"All right," laughed Andy, when all in the room were seated comfortably. "Let's go."

And this is the story that he read aloud, as he sat beside the glowing fire, the dancing fingers of which alternately splotched his manuscript with puddles of light and shadows:

The Diary of a Comet Coaster Boy

August 19—This morning when I was hippety-hopping down the street in front of Betty Sharpe's house (she's the girl with the pug nose who lives in the next block) I accidentally dropped a nickel through a crack in the wooden sidewalk. And, of course, as soon as she saw me fooling around out there she had to come out to see what was going on. Girls are that curious.

She had a big wad of chewing gum in her mouth. And thinking that she could make me envious she started stretching it—meaning the gum, of course, and not her mouth.

Which gave me an idea.

"Let me have a hunk of it," says I eagerly.

"A hunk of what?" says she, stretching artistically.

"Your gum," says I.

"Would you chew my gum, Trigger Berg?" says she, giving me a sort of sick-calf look.

Gosh! She thought that I was in love with her. Just like a girl, wasn't it?

"Of course not," says I quickly. "I just want to put it on the end of a stick."

"What for?" says she curiously.

"I dropped a nickel through a crack in the sidewalk," says I.

Up went her pug nose.

"Go buy your own gum," says she.

I watched her stretch.

"With that number nine mouth of yours," says I, "and those long arms, you sure would make a peachy sword swallower, all right. Why don't you get a job with a circus?"

Here to my good luck her gum got away from her. And putting a hunk of it on the end of a stick I soon brought my nickel up through the crack.

"Thanks," says I, offering her the stick.

"Did you hear about it?" she then inquired.

"What?" says I.

"My birthday party," says she.

"Are you going to have a birthday party?" says I eagerly.

"Of course," says she.

"When?" says I.

"Friday night," says she. "And I'm going to have a big birthday cake, too, with candles on it."

"Um-yum," says I, rubbing my stomach.

"If you come over at ten o'clock," says she generously, "you can stand outside the window and watch me eat it."

Which kind of sounded as though *I* was going to be left out!

"Is Slats invited?" says I, speaking the name

of one of my chums. There are four of us in our gang. The other two are Friday and Tail Light. The latter is Slats' kid brother. We call him Tail Light because, being the smallest, he always tags behind.

I had to ask her again if Slats was invited before she answered me.

"That little toughy!" says she, crooking her pug nose. "I should hope not."

"How about Friday?" says I.

"You're three of a kind," says she.

Here Mrs. Sharpe came to the front door.

"Betty dear," she called. "Come and sweep the kitchen floor."

"Haw! haw! haw!" says I. "Another Cinderella."

"You'll think I'm Cinderella," came loftily, "when you see me at the party Friday night, for I'm going to have a new dress and new shoes."

"Be careful," says I, referring to that part of the Cinderella story where the good fairy changed a pumpkin into a coach, "that you and the pumpkin don't get mixed up."

Which made her hot.

"Rowdy!" says she spitefully.

"Anyway," says I, speaking for my chums, "we wouldn't go to your old party if we were invited."

"Bobbie," says she, calling Tail Light by his real name, "is a nice little boy. But the rest of you are bums."

"Are you going to invite *him?*" says I, surprised.

"Of course," says she. "I like him. He's sweet. But I don't like you."

Which kind of shut me up. For, if the truth

must be told, Tail Light isn't much. And it made me hot to think that any girl, especially a smart girl like Betty, would be dumb enough to invite him to a party and leave me out. Calling him "sweet," too! Good grief! It would serve him right, I gritted my teeth, if I caught him on the way to the party and turned his pants inside out.

But I soon forgot about the coming birthday party when Slats and Tail Light meandered into sight with their Comet Coasters, to which sideboards had been bolted. Heading for the old Indian ford, where Friday was waiting for us with a rented boat, we later rowed to Bony Island (there used to be a slaughterhouse there) and loaded our boat with old bones, it having been agreed that our lodge room in Friday's barn would look much better if we had more bones for decorations.

I never worked so hard in all my life. And if I don't have the leg ache before morning I miss my guess. As for Tail Light, he petered out shortly after two o'clock and we had to make a bed for him in the weeds, later hauling him home on top of a load of skulls.

And to think that Betty Sharpe would pick out a worthless little squirt like him in preference to me. Gr-r-r-r! Instead of hauling him home—the dear little sweetie!—we should have dumped him in the river.

This evening when I was over to Slats' house I heard Tail Light coaxing his ma to buy him a new pair of long pants. I know, all right, what he's got on his mind. It's that blamed birthday party. The more I think of Betty Sharpe favoring him the madder I get.

August 20—We put in the day hauling bones and fixing up our lodge room. It sure looks swell. We have soap boxes for seats. And right over the door is a big skull with glass eyes. We have an altar, too, made of an old garbage can. For a Bible to do our swearing on (every lodge, you know, has its secrets that the members must swear to keep), we have an old doctor book, which, for our purpose, is just as good as a Bible. The part that we kiss when we do the swearing shows a man having his insides cut out. Friday colored the picture beautifully with red ink to make it look like blood.

Oh, yes, Tail Light came over to my house this evening to show me his new long pants. He has a pair of red suspenders, too. Boy, they're loud enough to flag a train! He can hardly wait, he says, till to-morrow night. I heard other kids talking about the party, too. I can see that it's going to be a swell party, all right. And because he's the only one in our gang to get an invitation Tail Light thinks he's smart. The little brat!

August 21—I guess that Tail Light won't have so much to say now about being Betty Sharpe's pet. For did he ever disgrace himself to-night at the party! Oh, baby! *Laugh?* Say, I thought I'd split my sides. As for the birthday cake—um-yum-yum! Slats and I and Friday got it all!

This morning Mrs. Sharpe came over to our house to telephone.

"I suppose you know," says she to my ma, when she got through ordering ice cream and dill pickles, "that to-day is Betty's birthday."

"Yes," says my ma, looking at me out of the corner of her eye (for she knew how I had been snubbed), "I heard something about a very select birthday party."

Mrs. Sharpe screwed her face up sort of concerned-like.

"I'm *so* sorry," says she, "that Betty didn't invite your boy. But she says he makes faces at her. And she can't bear the sight of the boy they call Friday and Tail Light's brother. . . . Would it inconvenience you, Mrs. Berg, if I borrowed your dining room chairs?"

"Not at all," says my ma generously.

"And I'd like to get your folding table, too, if you don't mind, and a dozen of your best spoons."

"I suppose," says my ma politely, as she got out the spoons and other truck, "that Betty is all excited over the coming party."

"Yes, indeed," says Mrs. Sharpe. "And you should see the *wonderful* birthday cake that Mrs. Camel is frosting for her. It stands this high," the speaker measured.

"I've heard," says my ma, "that Mrs. Camel is the best cake baker in the county."

"I always have her bake my party cakes," says Mrs. Sharpe. "And she does it so cheaply, too. But lately I've had to watch her, for she's getting old. And salt, you know, looks just the same as sugar to some near-sighted people."

Then, can you imagine it, the gabby old thing had the nerve to ask me to lug the borrowed chairs over to her house!

"I'm glad," says I, "that you've got a piano of your own."

"Which reminds me," says she promptly, turning to my ma, "that I *would* like to borrow your piano bench if it won't inconvenience you. For ours is a wreck."

My ma hid a smile.

"Trigger will be very glad," says she, "to haul it over to your house on his Comet Coaster."

Which I did. But bu-lieve me, I didn't *want* to do it.

"Oh! . . ." says Betty in that superior way of hers, when I dropped the junk on her front porch, which was all trimmed up with colored tissue paper. "Look who's here! He found out that I'm giving a party and he's hanging around."

"I wish you were a boy," says I hotly.

"Why?" says she.

"I'd like to sock you," says I.

Which brought a flash to her eyes.

"Rowdy!" says she spitefully.

"Are your guests going to stay all night?" says I.

"It's none of your business," says she, "if they do."

"I was just wondering," says I, "if your ma was liable to need a couple of beds."

Then who should percolate into sight but young Lochinvar himself.

"I was just thinking about you," says Betty sweetly.

"Me?" Tail Light spoke with great intelligence, shifting an all-day sucker from one side of his sticky mug to the other.

"Sure thing," says Betty, looking at him coyly.

"You certainly weren't overworking your

brain," I told her, "if you were thinking about *that* piece of cheese."

She gave me a look that was intended to chill my backbone.

"If you're through carrying furniture," says she loftily, "we'll excuse you."

I went home as mad as a pinched bumblebee.

"You sure were smart," I told my ma, "to make me lug that junk over there."

"By doing it," says she quietly, "you proved that you are a little gentleman. And I want you to know that I'm very proud of you."

Which made me feel better. For a boy likes to be appreciated.

Later Slats and I crawled into the gooseberry bushes in his back yard for a quiet talk.

"We've got to fix that kid," says he grimly.

"What kid?" says I.

"Tail Light," says he.

Boy! He was talking real stuff now.

"What shall we do to him?" says I eagerly. "Drag him into an alley when he starts for the party, and flavor him with Limburger cheese?"

"Shucks!" says Slats. "He'd never go to the party if we did that to him."

"I'd like to knock his block off," says I.

"He needs it," says Slats, "but, of course, a fellow your size can't pick on a little kid."

"I'm glad God wished him onto you," says I, sort of fervent-like, "instead of me."

"What do you suppose he told my ma this morning," says Slats.

"What?" says I.

"She asked him why I wasn't invited to the

party as well as him. And he told her that Betty said I was a bum."

"It's too bad," says I, "that a fellow can't use tar and feathers in a case like this."

But, bu-lieve me, we fixed that little squirt. And did I ever snicker up my sleeve when he sashayed past our house to-night on his way to the party, proud as a peacock in his new pants and red suspenders, never suspecting, of course, that we had secretly cut the main threads of his suspender buttons.

Later, when it got dark, Slats and I and Friday stood outside Betty's big bay window, through which we could see the select group playing "Winkem" and other games. The most conspicuous one in the room with his white shirt and blood-red suspenders, Tail Light was having the time of his life. Then, to our good fortune, someone suggested playing "Spin the platter."

While the others were getting the chairs arranged in a circle young Lochinvar and his sweetie sauntered over to the bay window.

"Are you having a good time?" says Betty, tickling the leaves of her ma's potted rubber plant with her delicate white hands.

"Swell," says Tail Light, manfully stretching his red suspenders.

Betty's eyes filled with admiration.

"Are they new?" she inquired, touching them gently.

"Sure thing," Tail Light puffed out his chest.

"I think they're beautiful," Betty breathed.

"The men are all wearing them," says Tail Light, giving them another husky stretch. "It's a new fad."

"Good night!" says Slats in my ear. "If he keeps on doing that the buttons will pop before he gets into the game."

Betty had a lot of advanced ideas.

"Did you ever hold a girl's hand?" says she coyly.

"Your hand reminds me of something that I saw on my Uncle Bob's farm," says Tail Light.

"What," says Betty quickly, thinking, of course, of a beautiful pond lily, or something like that.

"A white cat," says Tail Light.

"I like cats."

"This one had fits."

"The poor little thing!"

"One day it came up missing," Tail Light recited the whole eloquent story, "and we found it floating in my uncle's swill barrel."

"But you haven't answered my question yet," says Betty.

"What is it?"

"I asked you if you ever held a girl's hand."

Tail Light looked kind of uneasy.

"I guess you're hinting around for me to hold your hand, huh?"

"Of course not," Betty tried to make it sound convincing.

Tail Light looked relieved.

"Speaking of hands," says he, "did you ever hold anybody's foot?"

Betty drew herself up.

"Certainly not," says she haughtily.

"I did," Tail Light admitted brazenly.

"A *girl's* foot?" the words were spoken in a shocked voice.

"She used to be a girl," says Tail Light. "But she's my ma now."

"But what were you doing with her foot?"

"I always hold it for her when she trims her corns. And has she ever got a big one on her left foot! Oh, boy! It's bigger than my pa's elbow wart."

"Tee! hee! hee!" Betty gurgled. "You're *so* droll."

"When do we eat?" Tail Light then inquired, never suspecting, of course, that we were watching him through the window.

"Oh, in an hour or so," says Betty. Then, having seated herself beside the rubber plant, she sort of smoothed the front of her silk dress. "I've been expecting you to say something nice about my new frock," she gave Lochinvar another cue.

But instead of gracefully kissing her hand like they do in the movies, and junk like that, he rubbed his stomach.

"What kind of stuff has you ma fixed up?" he inquired hungrily.

"Sandwiches and pickles and ice cream and cake."

"How many sandwiches apiece?"

"As many as you can eat."

"Peanut butter or ham?"

"Both," says Betty. "But let's not talk about *sandwiches,*" she simpered. "I'd much rather have you talk about *me.*"

"What kind of cake are we going to have?" Tail Light continued the inventory.

"Angel food," says Betty, impatiently.

"And vanilla ice cream?"

"I think so," came coolly.

"I like it best with peanuts on it. . . . Do you like codfish gravy?"

"No," says Betty, sort of snapping out the word.

"I like it on mashed potatoes. . . . Ever eat blackbird stew?"

"Of course not," the speaker elevated her refined nose.

"The time I ate it on a camping trip I got the stomach ache, for a spider fell into it."

"It's too bad," says Betty frigidly, "that you didn't die."

Slats snickered in my ear.

"Don't ever tell me," says he, "that my kid brother lacks technique."

"He certainly has a way with the ladies," says I, snickering in pattern.

"It's his 'it,' " says Friday.

Then we watched sort of breathless-like as Tail Light was drawn into the "platter" game. Nor were we disappointed. Hearing his number called he made a heroic lunge for the spinning platter, his suspender buttons flying in six different directions as he kissed the parlor floor.

After which, as you can imagine, there was a mixed chorus of boyish giggles and shocked exclamations.

His gorgeous red suspenders having failed him, Tail Light saved himself from complete and everlasting disgrace by clutching the waist band of his sagging pants. Then, with a horrified look on his face, he beat it for the kitchen, where

Mrs. Sharpe did a neat reconstruction act with the family pincushion.

But the party's star guest was crushed. He showed it in his actions. And satisfied now with our revenge we would have skinned out for home if Friday hadn't stopped us at the door of Mrs. Sharpe's summer kitchen to point out the big birthday cake.

"I dare you to swipe it," says he eagerly.

"No," I quickly shook my head.

"Aw, come on," coaxed Slats.

"No," I shook my head again.

"But I thought you wanted to get even with Betty for snubbing you?"

I did. So in the end I gave in. For it was two against one. And skinning up the alley with the cake we cut it into thirds and ate it.

(Later.) Tail Light just stopped in to tell me about his accident at the party, never suspecting, of course, that I was partly responsible for his disgrace.

But I kicked him out, hardened liar that he was, when he told me that Betty had given him five pieces of her birthday cake. All the birthday cake *he* got you could stick in a gnat's eye.

(Still later.) Oh! Oh! Oh! I just found out that the cake we ate wasn't Betty's birthday cake at all, but a castor-oil cake. Which explains why it had such a queer taste. And which further explains why I have such queer rumbling pains in my stomach.

Half asleep, I jumped out of bed when I heard Mrs. Sharpe's voice downstairs, figuring, of course, that she had come over to our house to complain about me snitching the birthday cake.

"It's late, I know," says the gabby visitor. "But when I saw your light, Mrs. Berg, I washed the spoons (the Bronson boy bit one and bent it out of shape, but I straightened it) and brought them over as quickly as I could. . . . What was that? Oh, yes, the party was a *big* success. And here's a piece of the birthday cake. Betty asked me to bring it over to Trigger. It isn't the same cake, though, that I told you about this morning. Mrs. Camel flavored that one with castor oil by mistake and had to bake another. Fancy, too, what is liable to happen to the tramp who stole it out of my summer kitchen! I saw the man hanging around our house this afternoon. He had evil eyes. So I don't feel a bit sorry for him."

When my ma came upstairs to bed I told her the truth, for I was scared stiff. I didn't want to snitch the cake, I said. The other fellows sort of talked me into it. And having gotten my story she put her arms around me, telling me not to worry. The castor oil might keep me busy, she said, smiling, but it wouldn't kill me.*

*Used first as a serial in Andy's *Comet Coaster News,* a small magazine for boys, this story, illustrated by Bert Salg, was later brought out in book form for the added enjoyment of boys and girls. Andy, of course, read aloud only a small portion of the book, which, having been given the title, *Trigger Berg and His 700 Mouse Traps,* is now on sale, together with its companion, *Trigger Berg and the Treasure Tree,* in all bookstores and book departments where Grosset & Dunlap books are sold.

CHAPTER XX

IN THE SEALED ROOMS

THE following evening when Andy came home he was met at the front door by his grinning admirer.

"You're all out of luck," said Rusty.

"Meaning which?" queried Andy.

"Aunt Minnie has changed her mind."

"About what?"

"The séance."

"But she promised me that we could hold it to-night," the speaker's face showed the disappointment that he felt.

"Sure thing," nodded Rusty. "But to-day she heard something that scared her, and now she's afraid to go ahead."

"What did she hear?" came the quick inquiry.

"Footsteps."

Told then that Miss Andrews had fainted at the door of the sealed rooms, Andy hurried into the house. And he, too, was held in the grip of a peculiar fear as he passed the locked door with its somber black drapes. Could it be possible, he asked himself, that the spirit of the dead house

owner had indeed come back to earth, to express her disapproval of the proposed séance? Then he checked his fears. What the frightened daughter had mistaken for spirit footfalls was more probably a rat, he told himself sensibly.

Yet there *was* something weird about the closed door and the things that it concealed. In spite of himself he shivered anew.

Miss Andrews was in bed, her nerves having completely gone back on her. And though several hours had elapsed since her fright she was still noticeably wan and pale.

"As you know," she told Andy, when he stopped in her room to express his earnest sympathy, Jessie, of course, having elected to put the patient to bed and care for her, "I have no belief in spiritualism myself. Not the slightest. But I can't deny that my mother and old Mrs. Weedon were able to do uncanny things. They both told me that they would communicate with me after their death. And while I've been hoping for years that it *wouldn't* happen, I've constantly had the feeling that sooner or later I'd hear from them, my mother in particular. Daily I have listened at the closed door, drawn there as though by some powerful invisible magnet. And to-day, for the first time since my mother's death, seven years ago, I actually heard footfalls. Oh," the thin arms gestured, as the speaker's eyes glowed feverishly, "don't tell me that it was my imagina-

tion! I heard the footballs plainly, not once but a dozen times—pacing back and forth, back and forth. My mother was wont to thus move about when she was angry. How well I remember it! And now a member of the spirit world, I saw that she was angry because I had consented to let you probe some of the secrets of her strange belief. That must never happen, Andy. At least not in this house. Whether my parent's beliefs were right or wrong, I must respect them. Then her spirit will rest in peace."

Tom was waiting for Andy in the hall.

"What do you think of it?" the disturbed young clerk inquired.

"I think it's a lot of baloney," grunted Andy.

"That's what I tell Jessie," nodded Tom. "But she actually believes that the closed rooms are haunted. And if I can get her to stay here till the new house is finished it'll be a wonder."

"Say, Tom," Andy spoke thoughtfully.

"Well?"

"I think we ought to explore those rooms and prove to Aunt Minnie that there's nothing there except a possible rat."

Taken by surprise, Tom at first drew back.

"Oh, no," he cried. "She wouldn't want us to do that. Nor have we any right to do it."

"We'll be justified in the act," persisted Andy, "if we can prove to her that her fears are ground-

less. Otherwise she'll be in constant fear of the rooms as long as she lives."

Tom gave a queer laugh.

"Like you," he told his companion, "I'm too good a Methodist to take any stock in this crazy spiritualism stuff. Still, it's a queer mess. And now that you've suggested exploring the closed rooms, I'm curious to know what would happen if we tried out the spirit trumpet there. For if it *can* talk—which I doubt—that's the proper place to get results."

Andy was boyishly eager.

"Let's," he urged, thinking of the long-lost goose.

"I'm game if you are," Tom agreed.

"We may get a worse scare than Aunt Minnie," laughed Andy. "But what's that to worry about if we can locate the Maharaja's goose?"

Tom wondered at the other's unusual interest in the mechanical goose.

"What would you do with it if you found it?" he inquired curiously.

Andy saw no reason why he shouldn't tell his chum the truth, which he did. And parting, it was agreed between the daring boys that they were to meet at midnight, when the other members of the dual household were sound asleep, and penetrate the possible mysteries of the sealed rooms.

At nine-thirty Rusty and George sleepily climbed the stairs and got into bed. Later Jessie passed down the hall to her own room, after having made the patient comfortable for the night. The clock struck ten; then eleven; then twelve.

Andy emerged from his room carrying a flashlight.

"Is that you, Tom?" the inquiry was spoken in a low voice, as a dark form came into sight farther down the hall.

"Yes," was the short reply.

"Got the trumpet?"

"Sure thing."

"Well, for Pete's sake don't drop it. . . . Is Aunt Minnie asleep?"

"I think so."

"How about the kids?"

"I had to go into their room to get the trumpet, for George had it hidden under his bed. But they never heard me."

"Are you scared?"

"A little bit."

"I feel kind of shaky myself. But we're doing right. I'm sure of that."

"I hope so."

"As I told you, Aunt Minnie would forever live in fear of those rooms if we didn't prove to her that what she heard this afternoon was only a rat."

Tom gave a nervous laugh.

"IT'S THE MAHARAJA'S GOOSE!" ANDY GAVE A HAPPY SHOUT.

Andy Blake and the Pot of Gold. *Page* 224

"And how exciting, huh, if we find out where the goose was put away?"

"It will be an interesting experiment," acknowledged the leader. "But, frankly, I don't expect any results, for I'm too practical-minded to let myself believe that any spirit can talk through a trumpet."

"Aunt Minnie insists that she heard spirit voices in the trumpet."

"Either she was tricked," declared Andy, "or she let her imagination get away from her."

"And you really believe that what she heard this afternoon was a rat?"

"I certainly don't think that it was her mother's spirit."

"Death is a big mystery, Andy."

"Possibly. But let's not talk about it now."

Stopping at the closed door the boys produced several keys, trying them one after another in the lock.

"Hot dog!" breathed Andy, as the door swung open. "It was easier than I expected."

"I had a hunch," said Tom, "that the upstairs locks were all alike. They usually are in old houses like this."

Andy gagged as the room's musty odors assailed his nostrils.

"Smells like an old tomb," said Tom, following his companion into the dusty bedchamber.

"*Good* night! Don't talk about tombs."

"Going to close the door?"

"Sure thing."

"Don't lock it," came the quick injunction.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Well . . . we may want to get out of here in a hurry."

Andy then asked for the trumpet.

"Hear anything?" Tom inquired.

"No."

"Let me have it."

There was a brief silence, broken only by the spirited ticking of the big clock as it stood on guard in the outer hall.

"I can hear you breathing," said Tom.

"How do you know it isn't a spirit?" came the joke.

"*Andy!* Did you hear that?"

"What?" the word was spoken breathlessly.

"I heard a sigh. *There!* Didn't you hear it?"

"No."

The trumpet again changed hands.

"By George!" gasped Andy. "I *can* hear something."

"Ask about the goose," Tom prompted eagerly.

"Is it you, Mrs. Andrews?" Andy then inquired of the room's invisible tenant. "And can you tell us where Mrs. Weedon hid the Maharaja's goose?"

There was another dead silence. Then both

boys gave a startled cry as the room was suddenly thrown into pitch darkness.

"Turn on the light," panted Tom, clutching his chum's arm.

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"The bulb's burned out, I guess."

"Gee-miny crickets! I'm going to get out of here."

"You and me both."

"Ouch!"

"What's the matter?"

"I bumped into something."

"A chair?"

"No, it's a bed."

"We must be on the wrong side of the room."

"*Andy!*"

"For the love of mud! You'll scare me to death if you let out another squawk like that."

"But there's someone *in* the bed," Tom thus justified his fright.

"How do you know?" the speaker gasped in turn.

"Feel here."

What Andy touched in the dark was a human hand. But it wasn't a cold hand. And then, in a flash, as he jerked his wits together, he grasped the truth of the situation.

"It's your brother," he told Tom, referring to the runaway.

A moment later a wildly happy voice rang through the house.

"Rusty! Jessie! Bennie! Aunt Minnie! Get up—quick! We've found Ralph. He was the spook that you heard this afternoon, Aunt Minnie. He was hiding in your mother's rooms."

CHAPTER XXI

FOUND AT LAST!

HAPPINESS is a great tonic. Miss Andrews found it so. Joining the others in the hall, where the reunited twins were wrapped in each other's arms, each seemingly trying to strangle the other, so glad were they to be together again, she forgot all about her nerves.

"It's him, Aunt Minnie. It's really him. Feel of him. See? It isn't a ghost. No. It's Ralph himself. And he's got a new wart on his neck."

Rusty was wild with joy. And had the others been less excited they would have laughed heartily at his crazy antics as he pranced up and down the hall, a comical picture indeed in his baggy pajamas.

"He was hiding in the closed rooms, Aunt Minnie. He's been there for more than a week, he says. Tom and Andy found him sound asleep in your mother's bed."

The woman then gave her roomer a reproving glance.

"And you let me think that what I heard this afternoon was my mother's spirit! Why didn't

you tell me the truth?" she demanded sharply.

"You were so sure, Aunt Minnie, that what you heard was a spirit that I didn't like to argue the matter with you," Andy spoke earnestly, thinking to himself, as the younger ones milled about him, that never in all his young life had he witnessed a happier scene. "I really thought there were rats in the rooms, as I told Tom. And to prove it to you, and thus relieve your future fears, we secretly unlocked the door. But instead of a rat," the speaker concluded with a gay laugh, "we found a sleeping beauty."

Rusty made another dive at his beloved twin brother.

"Boy, I'm so happy I could sock you."

"Please don't sock me," cried Ralph, glad tears showing in his eyes. "Hug me instead," he added, with a tremor in his voice.

"Good old Turk!" the words were spoken affectionately.

The twins looked into each other's eyes.

"You can't imagine how I missed you, Rusty. Oh, gee! It was terrible. I shiver now when I think about it. And I never, never, never want to leave you again."

"But where were you?" Rusty inquired curiously.

"Every place," was Ralph's ambiguous reply. "I—I got into trouble," he explained. "That's why I ran away. But I couldn't stay away. At night I lay awake thinking about you and Tom

and Sis and little Bennie. I just *had* to come back."

"I thought about you, too," piped up the beaming baby brother. "And every night I asked God to take care of you. Didn't I, Jessie?"

The older sister had gotten the little fellow out of bed, realizing that he, too, would want to share in the joy attending the beloved one's return.

"Yes, dear," she let her strong young arms close more tightly around the frail body.

Stooping, Ralph soberly kissed his little brother on the forehead.

"I never realized before what a good home I had till I lost it," he added, in a husky voice. "I came back a week ago. First I thought of hiding in the barn. But I was afraid of being seen. I wanted to see you, and be near you," he spoke directly to his sister and brothers, "but I didn't want you to see me. I didn't *dare* to let you see me, for I was afraid of the law. Then I remembered about the closed rooms. I wasn't afraid of spirits. I had too many other things on my mind. So I climbed a tree and opened a window. I've been up and down the tree several times since. And if you've missed stuff out of the garden you now know where it went to."

"Laws-a-me!" came sharply from the house owner. "That explains where the pie disappeared to that I put in my porch cupboard night before last."

Ralph gave a wan grin.

"It was good pie," he smacked, trying to act like his old self.

"Did you take that piece of beef, too, that I was saving for sandwiches?"

"Yes, Aunt Minnie."

"And I thought all the time that your brother had snitched it on me!"

"As though I'd do a thing like that," laughed Rusty, making a comical face.

"Anyway," the maiden lady gave the returned runaway a loving glance, "I'm glad you got enough to eat. And I'm glad, too, that the closed rooms served a useful purpose. Everything has worked out to show me how foolish I'd be to longer adhere to my mother's silly request. To-morrow I'm going to do some cleaning in this part of the house. And that door," she pointed stiffly, "never will be closed again if *I* have anything to say about it. I may not be showing my dead parents the proper respect, but it isn't right, as I can see now, to harbor something in my own home that is a constant fear to me. I want God's daylight here, not the devil's darkness."

Andy laughed, telling how he and Tom had tried out the spirit trumpet in the closed rooms.

"We really thought at first that we were in touch with the spirit world. But what we heard was the sleeper in the bed."

"And maybe you think *I* wasn't scared," Ralph put in, "when I woke up and found Tom bend-

ing over me with a lighted match in his hand."

The older brother gave an odd laugh.

"No wonder the detective couldn't find you."

"And did you know it was him before you struck a light?" Jessie inquired of Tom.

"Andy said it was him. Though how he guessed it is more than I can figure out."

"Oh," laughed the happy roomer, "it just popped into my head."

Asked them to tell his complete story and assured that he had nothing to fear from the law, the runaway gave a detailed account of the automobile accident and his later flight. He and the car thief rode all night, he said, a second thief joining them in Chicago.

"They weren't my kind," the story went on. "So the next morning I skinned out. Nor have I seen them since. Dodging the towns, and following the unfrequented country roads, I worked for my meals here and there. One farmer offered me a steady job. I stayed there a week. And don't think that I'm a baby when I tell you that every night I cried myself to sleep. The farmer's wife asked me if I was sick. I didn't tell her that I was homesick. I was scared to death that she would find out who I was and send for the police. So, to escape her questions, I again skinned out, taking a few sandwiches with me, and stuff like that. Then I wound up here. I got here one night at ten o'clock. I saw you

through the window. You were all gathered around the center table. I wanted to run inside and throw my arms around you. Instead——"

Here the speaker's emotion overcame him.

The runaway's return, of course, was the subject of much excited comment throughout the community. Some of the less sympathetic neighbors called him a bad boy, declaring that the proper place for him was in the state reformatory. And feeling their antagonism, Ralph, as the days passed, became noticeably quieter and more reflective. Having learned his lesson, he intended hereafter to do what was right and be less headstrong.

The editor of the local newspaper, having growing sons of his own, took a charitable view of the affair, stating in his comprehensive article that the runaway was much less of a villain than some people thought and more of a victim of circumstances. The news story concluded with the following "preachment" which it will pay all boys to read carefully and remember:

"Aside from taking the car without permission, the Flannigan boy did just one seriously wrong thing: He should not have listened to the stranger nor permitted himself to be enticed away from home. The greatest sympathy and understanding comes to a boy in his own home. If he gets into trouble, no one will do more to help him than his parents and older brothers and sisters.

"A boy should take his troubles to his parents,

and not act on the advice of strangers. Consider the grief and worry that would have been averted had Ralph Flannigan said: 'No, I will not run away. I will go to my brother Tom and tell him what has happened. He will help me.' That would have been the manly thing to do under the circumstances and the only right thing."

Colonel Dickey would not admit that his returned automobile showed any damage. And so the case against Ralph was dismissed for all times, though, as can be imagined, it was many weeks before the young onion weeder (whose job was waiting for him!) felt at ease around his noble-spirited employer.

Earning the money for their suits, the twins were as appropriately dressed as the other Scouts when the big camp was opened on the river bank south of town, the sale of the land netting George another five thousand dollars. It was a big outing. And no one enjoyed it any more than the busy Colonel himself, now the idol of the town's youth.

By special invitation Andy and Tom spent a night in camp. And what a memorable night it was! A treasure hunt had been planned, Andy having generously offered to contribute the necessary prizes. In searching for the hidden treasure the excited Scouts uncovered something in the "dungeon" of far more value than the supplied candy bars.

"We found it under one of the flat stones," the

boys explained, lugging their strange find into the light.

"It's the Maharaja's goose!" Andy gave a happy shout.

Alas, though, the once perfect mechanism of the marvelous goose was rusted beyond repair. As for the "golden" eggs, it turned out that the recovered eggs were merely carved bits of wood, from which the gilt coating had long ago disappeared. Very often the value of recounted hidden "treasure" is thus exaggerated.

The goose having been given to Colonel Dickey, to add to his collection, Andy later sought Mr. Rollins in the latter's office in Chicago.

"Good work!" praised the manager, when told that the long-lost goose had been recovered.

"I can borrow it for you whenever you need it," Andy spoke with glowing eyes. "But I doubt if it will be of much use to you. For the whole thing is a wreck, having been in the ground so long."

Mr. Rollins arose and put a steady hand on the boy's firm young shoulder.

"Andy," he spoke gravely, "I owe you an explanation. It wasn't to find the long-lost goose that I sent you back to Manton, though, of course, it is entirely probable that we will make the recovered goose the keynote of an advertising campaign as I mentioned. Everybody else having failed to find the hidden goose, I never

dreamed that you would succeed. I merely used the goose as a pretext."

Andy's eyes met the other's.

"I don't understand," he faltered.

"There was another reason why I wanted you to return to Manton, more important than treasure hunting. Had I told you outright what that reason was you might have been depressed, a thing I wanted to avoid. So, as I say, I used the goose as a pretext. . . . May I speak frankly?"

"Yes, sir," the boy spoke wonderingly.

"Your advertising success has been outstanding. You have set a high mark for other aspiring boys. Yet you were dissatisfied. You really had too big an opinion of yourself. No, do not misunderstand me—I'm not saying that in an unkind way. As a matter of fact boys of purpose should have a good opinion of themselves. Self-confidence is an attribute of success. But you were overly ambitious. So eager were you to tackle still bigger merchandising problems, for personal gain, that you overlooked present obligations. Had it occurred to you, Andy, that your company would suffer if you left them?"

"No, sir."

"But you knew that they wanted you to stay."

"Yes, sir."

"As a matter of fact, the Boy Products Company, of which you are a part, is at a very critical point in its development. You have a summer

line. What your young president wants to do is to introduce a line of sleds, to thus provide the growing factory with a year-round outlet. That has been talked over in detail. Yet you wanted to quit, and come back to me, when the job was only half done! That was no credit to you, my boy."

"I see now what you mean," the younger one spoke soberly. "And I'm glad, Mr. Rollins, that you had the good sense to send me back to Manton. I'm going to stay there as long as I'm needed. Not because it's my duty, but because I want to."

A whimsical expression crossed the man's face.

"Did you ever chase rainbows, Andy?"

"Sure thing," the boy's eyes danced.

"So have I. But always the rainbows vanished before I quite arrived at the proper place to dig for the fabled pot of gold. You were more successful."

The listener misunderstood.

"But the eggs weren't gold, Mr. Rollins."

"I'm not talking about the goose and its accompanying eggs. I'm talking about the Flannigan children. *They* are the treasure that you found at the foot of the rainbow. I knew about Tom and his sister and brothers. For my cousin writes to me frequently. There, I saw, was a deserving boy who had none of your advantages. It would be a good thing, I figured, for you to meet Tom. Then you would better appreciate

your own good fortunes. Life means more to us if we help others. So I sent you to my cousin's home, not to communicate with spirits, but to become the chum of a boy you could help. I sent you on a rainbow chase, as it were. And you found the pot of gold, just as I had hoped you would."

Later Mr. Rollins showed his younger visitor this telegram of earlier date:

MILO ROLLINS,
Chicago, Ill.

Andy is on his way to Chicago to talk you into giving him a job. Please do not hire him, for we need him worse than you do. He helped us get started. Our Comet Coasters are going over big, but we may fall down on the proposed line of sleds without his help. If it is money that he wants we can pay him more—I'll take it out of my own salary, if necessary. And if he will stay here and help us put the business on a secure foundation his stock holdings will make him rich. For the good of our young company, persuade him to at least stay another year. We will forever feel indebted to you.

GEORGE WARMAN, President,
Boy Products Company,
Manton, Ill.

And here our story ends, with the new Beeker Street cottage rapidly nearing completion, and brighter things in store for the Flannigan children.

Andy has promised to impart some of his

knowledge of advertising to the deserving twins. And very probably they, too, like the hero of this series of books, will be permitted to serve an apprenticeship in Mr. Rollins' big advertising agency.

As for Tom—good, steady, deserving Tom! —what *he* did, with Andy's help, exchanging store clothes for factory overalls, and, in the end, bringing unusual credit to himself, can best be told in a separate volume.

Now that he can afford it, George wants to go away to school. So the fortunate young heir will not appear in the new book. But the twins will be in it! So will Aunt Minnie and a new character, Uncle Peter, a droll old man who has a penchant for odd songs, to which he dreamily thrums an accompaniment on his battered banjo. The family disgrace! Ashamed of him, Jessie was determined to get rid of him. But no "bad penny" ever returned with greater consistency than meek Uncle Peter. It is very probable, too, that Buddy and his goat will both appear in the promising new book. More fun! More skylarking pranks! More boyish adventures! And much earnest reading. For Tom's adventures in the new book are primarily industrial adventures.

Andy Blake, Boy Builder, is the title. And it's coming soon.

THE END

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JERRY TODD AND THE TALKING FROG
JERRY TODD AND THE PURRING EGG
JERRY TODD IN THE WHISPERING CAVE
JERRY TODD, PIRATE
JERRY TODD AND THE BOB-TAILED ELEPHANT
JERRY TODD EDITOR-IN-GRIEF

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ANDY BLAKE
ANDY BLAKE'S COMET COASTER
ANDY BLAKE'S SECRET SERVICE
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THE X BAR X BOYS AT RUSTLER'S GAP
THE X BAR X BOYS AT GRIZZLY PASS
THE X BAR X BOYS LOST IN THE ROCKIES

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TOM SLADE WITH THE FLYING CORPS
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